THE ANOMALIST

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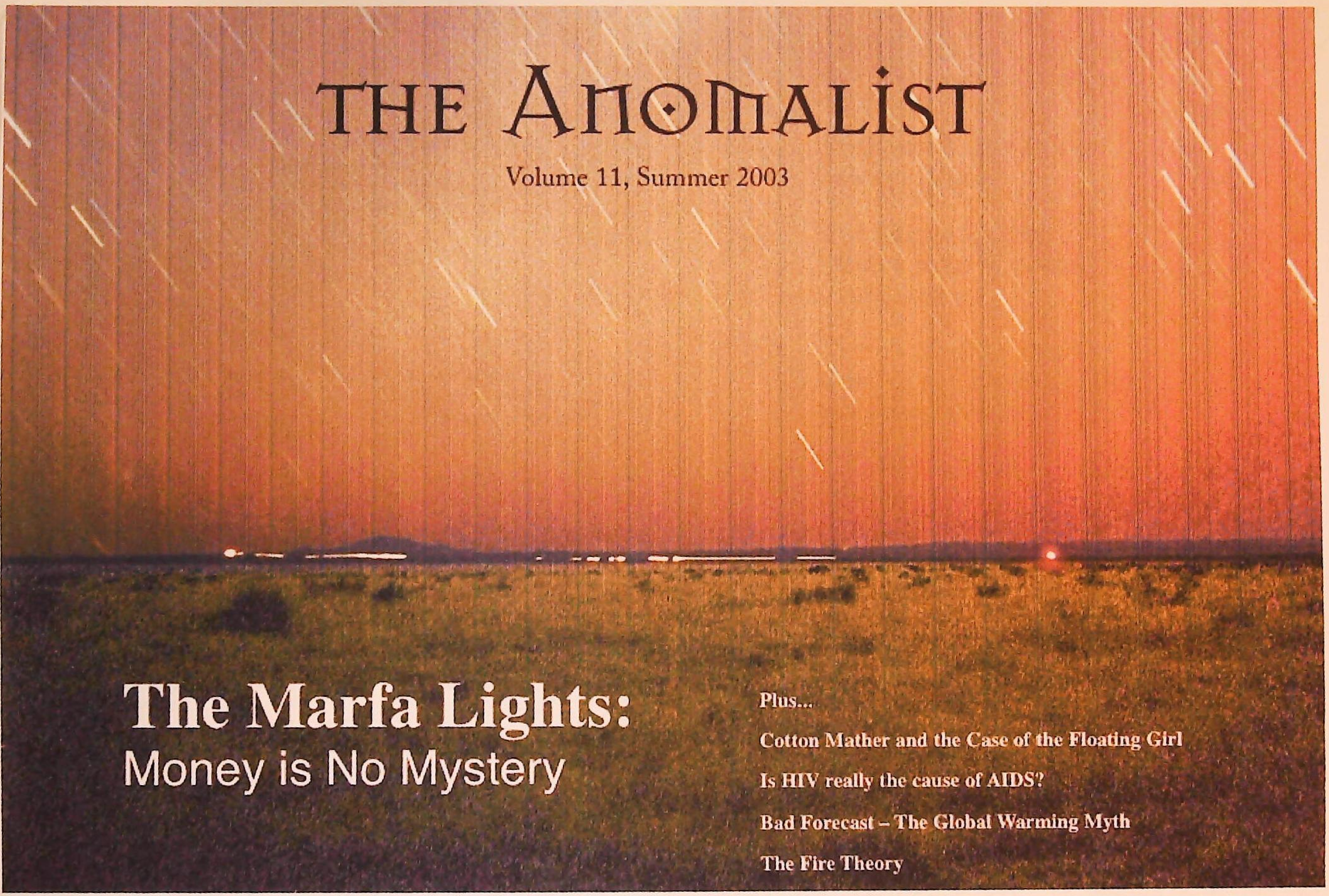

The Marfa Lights:
Money is No Mystery

Plus...

- Cotton Mather and the Case of the Floating Girl
- Is HIV really the cause of AIDS?
- Bad Forecast – The Global Warming Myth
- The Fire Theory

THE ANOMALIST
Edited and Published by
Patrick Huyghe and Dennis Stacy
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Welcome to the Fringe

by Patrick Huyghe

I am pleased to report that there has been an explosive growth of late in the ranks of "fringe scientists." All its newest members have doctoral degrees and are university affiliated. I'm not talking about ufologists and cryptozoologists and parapsychologists. Oh no, we have plenty enough of them, don't we? Those who I'd like to welcome to the fold are a host of climatologists and other environmental scientists.

How have these distinguished fellows come to be members of the fringe, you ask? Well, you may have noticed that scientists are having quite a tiff over the global warming issue. In this field, as in the not-so-distinguished fields of ufology, cryptozoology and parapsychology, there are the "believers" and there are "skeptics." But while it's politically correct to be a skeptic when it comes to UFOs, ESP, and astrology, on the global warming issue it's politically correct to be a believer. In fact, the believers of global warming have begun calling its skeptics "fringe scientists." Imagine!

Orthodox scientists won't bat an eye when their colleagues call them cranks, extremists, amateurs, flakes, even pathological. But "fringe scientists"!? That must be the ultimate insult. While ufologists and their counterparts in the X-sciences are used to this epithet being thrown their way, for climatologists and environmental scientists, it's really demeaning to be dumped into the same basement as the pseudoscientists so near and dear to our hearts—most of whom are by now quite inured to the "fringe" epithet.

So here is how it happened. In the late 1990s, a report signed by a US Congressman, George E. Brown Jr., branded those who argue that climate change is overblown practitioners of "fringe science." The slur was directed at any scientist who disagreed with the United Nations perspective about the putative human impact on the climate. Although the report was entitled: "Environmental Science Under Siege: Fringe Science and the 104th Congress," it has nothing to do with fortean phenomenon, not even fish falls.

But wait, there's more to the report. Referring to a Nov. 16, 1995 hearing on global warming, Brown, who was then the ranking minority member of the Committee on Science of the U.S. House of Representatives, alleged that data-based (empirical) arguments are unscientific. Data is unscientific—that's what the fringe scientists we are more familiar with have always been told. But now, it seems, climatologists are facing the same dismal reality.

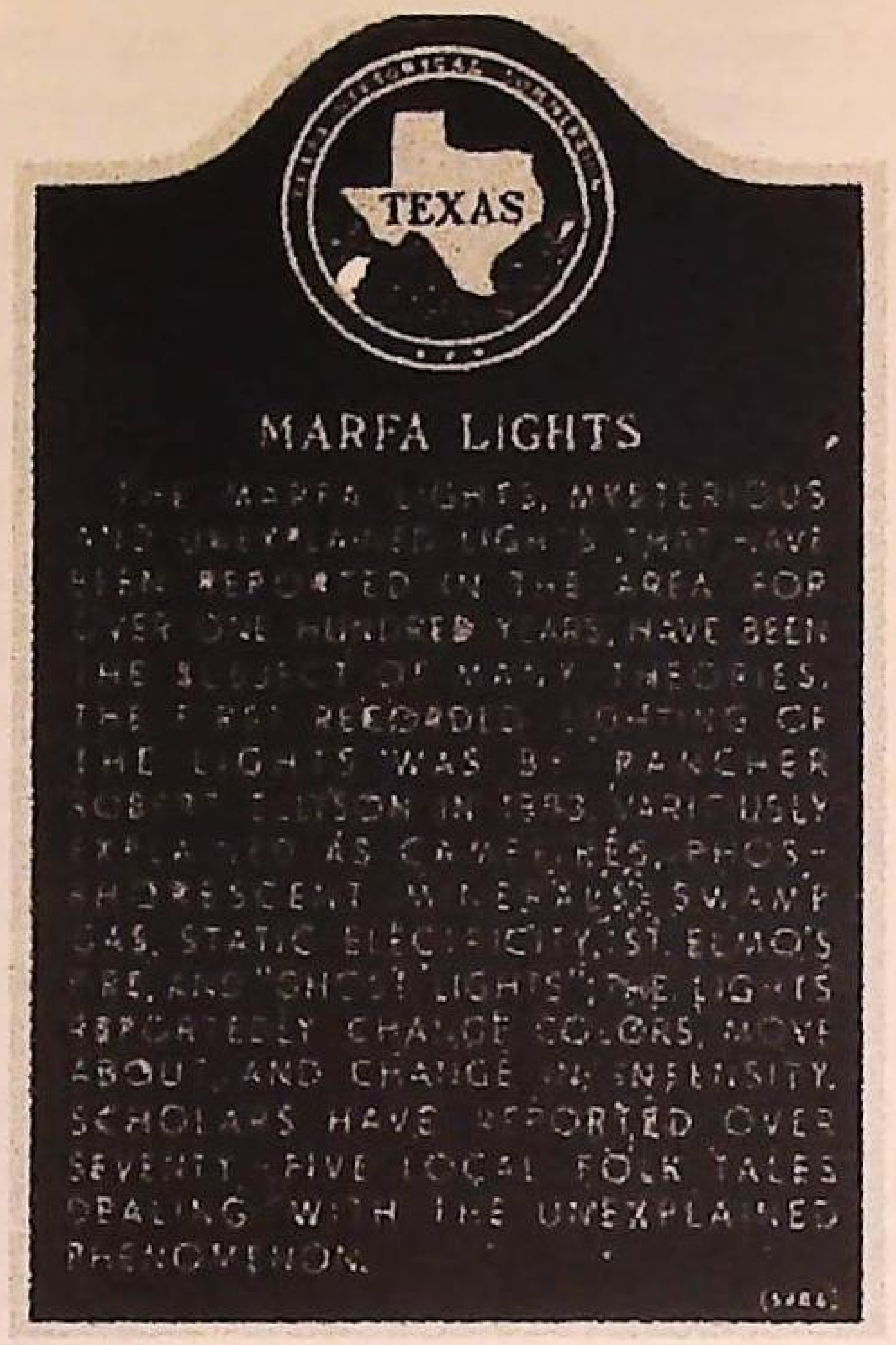
You don't believe me? Here are Brown's own words: "By equating sound science with empirical science, the [Republican-dominated] Subcommittee has attempted to sever the link between peer-reviewed science and policy and to stop environmental regulation in its tracks." Regardless of what Brown says, however, we all know that data is the cornerstone of science. It's even the cornerstone of fringe science.

But the report gets even worse in ways all too familiar to those of us on the margins of science. It appears that Brown and his Democrats think that these skeptical scientists are actually *conspiring* to destroy science by relying on data. "The emerging effort to truncate the scientific method at the initial observations stage," notes Brown, "endangers the ability of the scientific community to unify its understanding not only of environmental problems, but any phenomenon." For Brown, truth is a mere pawn.

The underlying problem is this: the global warming skeptics have been pointing to data that essentially demolishes the initial large forecasts of global warming by the believers. Their effrontery has created the great fight over what to do about greenhouse gases and global warming. And the fight has been exacerbated by the fact that these "fringe scientists" happen to be vocal and articulate. As the viewpoint of these skeptics has begun seeping into the newspapers and talk shows, the believers have become increasing fearful—and desperate. Brown has asked the scientific community to suppress its internal dissent.

"Brown's report is clearly unprecedented in the history of American science," writes University of Virginia professor Patrick Michaels in his bi-weekly report called *World Climate Report*. "It brings back, with a haunting chill, memories of other Congressional hearings where people were blackballed for their beliefs, or, even worse, accused of believing in things that they did not."

This sort of thing is not new, of course. It's happening every day in the "real" fringe sciences. The back corridors of orthodoxy are chock full of beleaguered fringe scientists. To climatologists and environmentalists, all we can say is: welcome to the club—and be careful out there!



MARFA LIGHTS

THE MARFA LIGHTS, MYSTERIOUS AND UNEXPLAINED LIGHTS THAT HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN THE AREA FOR OVER ONE HUNDRED YEARS, HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECT OF MANY THEORIES. THE FIRST RECORDED SIGHTING OF THE LIGHTS WAS BY RANCHER ROBERT ELLISON IN 1883. VARIOUSLY EXPLAINED AS CAMPFIRES, PHOSPHORESCENT MINERALS, SWAMP GAS, STATIC ELECTRICITY, ST. ELMO'S FIRE, AND "GHOST LIGHTS," THE LIGHTS REPORTEDLY CHANGE COLORS, MOVE ABOUT, AND CHANGE IN INTENSITY. SCHOLARS HAVE REPORTED OVER SEVENTY-FIVE LOCAL FOLK TALES DEALING WITH THE UNEXPLAINED PHENOMENON.

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The Marfa Lights:

Money Is No Mystery

by Dennis Stacy

For something that may not even exist, the Marfa Lights have been very, very good to their namesake hometown. Last Labor Day, at the tenth annual Marfa Lights Festival, I jostled blue jeans, gimmie caps and plastic beer cups with nearly 6000 other people drawn to the small town square during the three-day event, more than doubling Marfa's workday population of 2500. Clearly the majority had come for the Festival itself and not the so-called Mystery Lights for which it is named, its ostensible raison d'etre. The couples and families I saw could have given a raccoon's ass or an owl's hoot about the Lights; they were busy soaking up the sights and smells, the free bands, cheap fajitas and keg beer, not to mention a bewildering variety of Dallas Cowboys paraphrenalia on display, all of it for sale. Not a few of the single ranchhands and *vaqueros*, I suspect, were roped into town by the three tightly red-skirted Budweiser Girls hired for the occasion, prepared to pose only for a picture while promoting a youthful mirage of perpetual sex and suds. The weather at 4830 feet — high in the upper 80s, a 360-degree blue bowl of crystal-clear sky — didn't hurt attendance, either. For dollar, tourist and activity-starved Marfa, the Festival shows that you don't necessarily need a horse and calf (the latter in short supply around here, anyway, after a now three-year-long drought) to throw a profitable weekend rodeo. Any excuse will do in a pinch.

Budweiser
Budweiser
AMBULA

Budweiser Girls lights up the Marfa Lights Festival

And Marfa is pinched. Not that it has *nothing* to offer a casual visitor. In fact, it boasts Texas's tallest golf course. At this altitude, you can slice the old wobbly a country mile. But with only nine prairie-flat holes, don't expect Tiger Woods to unlimber his irons and wing his way out west for a couple of rounds anytime soon. History, no problem. Hell, the town gets its name from a character in a 19th century Russian novel and you can't get much more historical than that. Seems the wife of a railroad executive was reading Feodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* when the train stopped to take on water way back in 1883. Three-quarters of a century later, in 1955, Edna Ferber's Lone Star classic, *Giant*, was filmed here. James Dean's triumvirate (and triumphant) last movie — he died in a car crash a month after it wrapped — *Giant* also starred Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor. Trouble is, nothing much remains from those glory days except the memories, unless you count the movie posters lining the lobby of the downtown Paisano Hotel where most of the crew and cast stayed during filming. (Ever the eccentric, Dean holed up with a local family.) The famous ranch house, only a Hollywood facade to begin with, has long since returned to wind-blown dust. In the 80s, minimalist artist and sculptor Donald Judd, backed by the hoity-toity Dia Foundation out of New York, began buying up various Marfa properties and moving his own static art in, much of which resembles the sort of concrete structures that would otherwise pass for an anonymous highway culvert in this part of the country. But earlier this decade Judd up and died. His work is still displayed locally by the Chinati Foundation he established — the site once housed German prisoners of war — but art of whatever sort is still a serious hard sell in west Texas. It's difficult to imagine the Marfa Chamber of Commerce mounting an annual Donald Judd Day and bussing in art aficionados from nearby San Angelo, Midland and Odessa.

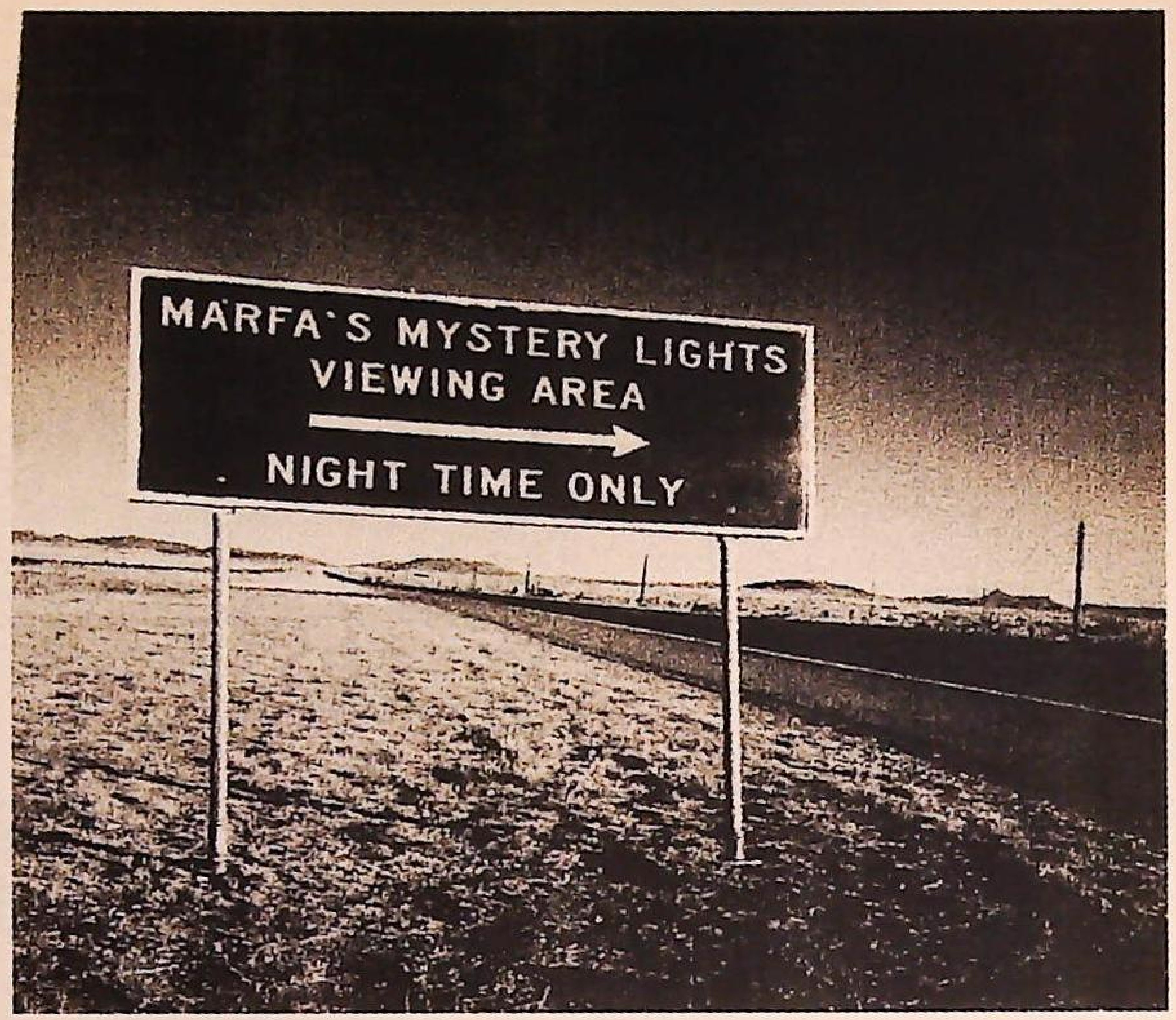
No, what Marfa has the firstest and mostest of is the Mystery Lights, even though no one has the faintest notion of what they are. The skeptical solution is that the twinkling lights, most often seen at the base of the distant Chinati Mountains, are nothing more mysterious than automobile headlights glimpsed on Hwy 67 between Presidio and Marfa, with a possible mirage or other atmospheric effect thrown in for good measure, thereby accounting for the Lights' widely reported nocturnal antics, which include splitting in two and bouncing up and down like ghostly, luminous jumping beans. Trouble with the headlight theory is, reports of the Lights date back to well before the Model T first penetrated the Trans-Pecos.

Rancher Robert Ellison made the first recorded sighting of unknown lights in the area in an 1883 diary entry, thinking they might be Indian campfires. Apache legends, dating back a century or more, took two basic forms. Either the Lights were viewed as the souls of star-crossed lovers searching in vain for each other, or as the spirits of brave departed warriors who would one day reclaim the desolate land as their own. Shortly after the turn of the century, Hallie Stillwell, now in her nineties and a local legend in her own right, remembers seeing the Lights down near the Rio Grande River, an episode dramatized on a segment of the perpetually popular TV program, "Unsolved Mysteries," for which I served as a consultant.

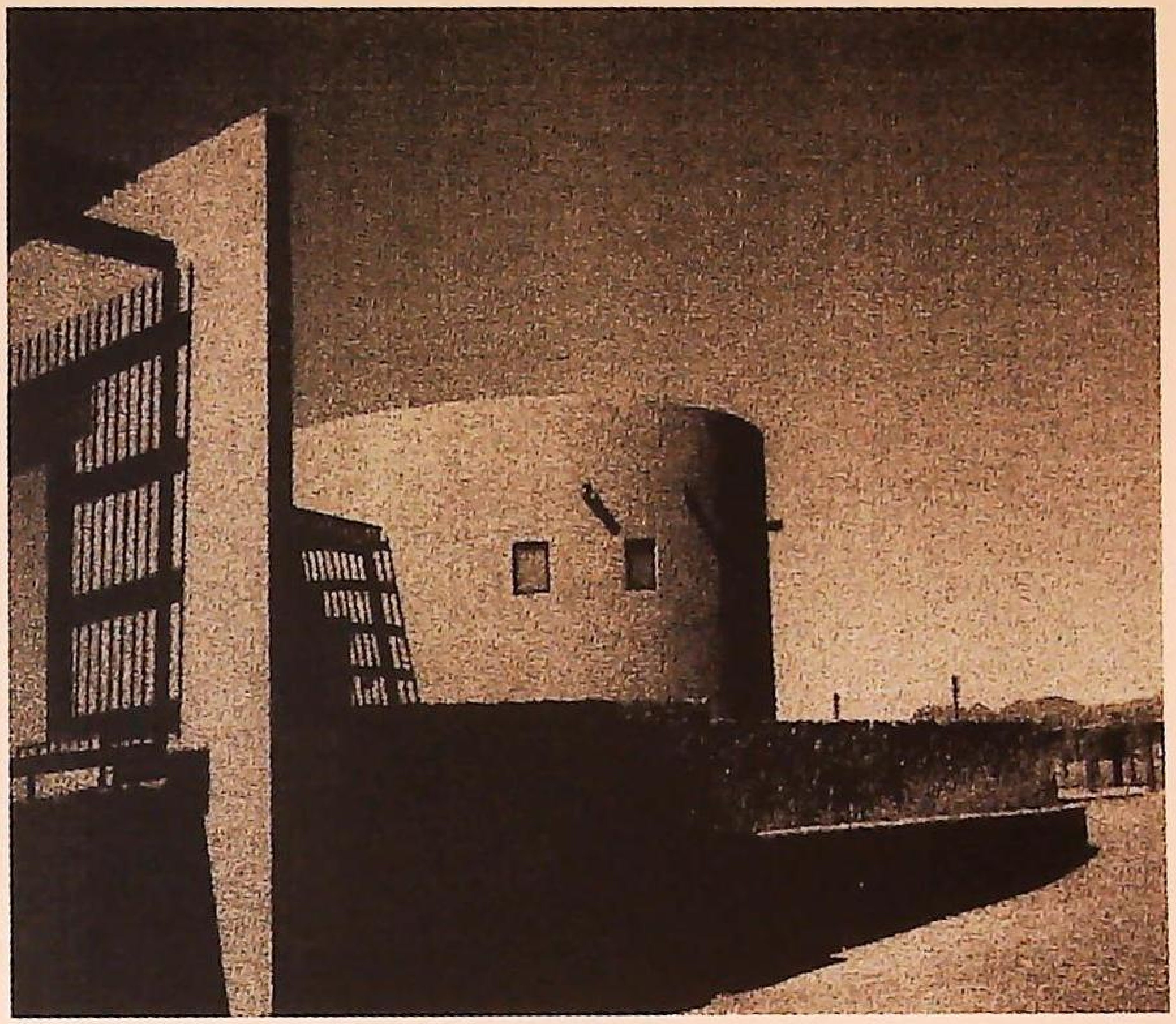
Virtually every native Marfan, if asked, has a story about the Lights. *Big Bend Sentinel* editor and publisher Robert Halpern has spent all his life here, if you don't count the eight years majoring in journalism at the University of Texas, El Paso, and an internship at the Odessa paper. "I *think* I've seen the Lights," Halpern likens. It was lo many years ago, when he was in highschool and wont as most west Texas teenagers were in those days to spend Friday and Saturday nights parked somewhere on a deserted ranch road, guzzling beer and shooting the bull. "You could say we'd been drinkin'," he admits, "but you couldn't say we were drunk."

Halpern and buddies suddenly noticed two large bodies of diffuse yellowish light — "I call them fuzz balls," he says — floating above the desert floor beneath the jagged outline of the Chinatis. "They were in the direction of the mountains," says Halpern, "but much closer and lower. I'd definitely say they were out on Mitchell Flat," the basin bottom that surrounds Marfa and stretches off to the south before stairstepping its way down to the Rio Grande.

The ranch road on which Halpern parked that night is now closed to the public (another sign of the times), but the official Marfa Lights Viewing Area is not. Nine miles east of town on Hwy 90, back toward Alpine, the Viewing Area has undergone several transactions since I first began spending time here in the early 80s. On my first visit it was little more than a roadside pullover on the south side of the highway, marked by a small, single-pole sign. The sign proved such a tempting souvenir that the state, tired of replacing it on a regular basis, eventually erected the more permanent two-pole structure that now marks the site,



Over the years the viewing area has gone from a simple highway pullover...



...to a full-fledged, million dollar-plus tourist facility. *Photos by Dennis Stacy*

accompanied by a historical marker graced by two bullet holes at last count. (Many standing objects in this area serve as target practice sooner or later.) Earlier this decade, local rancher and one-time gubernatorial candidate Clayton Williams donated some adjoining land to the state. The Highway Department landscaped the thereby expanded lot with boulders and cactus plants, and put up a few picnic tables, turning it into a pleasant enough roadside rest stop lacking only a portable toilet.

Park here as the evening's gloaming darkens the desert and chances are you'll see the Lights, too, or what passes for them in the mind of most one-time visitors. With what little light's left, look away to the southwest and locate the purple cones jutting above the horizon. Those are the Chinatis. Mark their location well because you won't be able to see them once night falls. At their leftmost shoulder a bright, twinkling light suddenly springs into view, sparkling in the high mountain air like a landed star. Leisurely, it traces a path downward and to the right, winking in and out of view at the end of its extremely shallow arc. Just as it disappears, another "star" leaps into view at the same starting point and proceeds to mimic the behavior of its predecessor. At times, there may be as many as two or three points of light along the twinkling path. If the traffic seems heavier on the weekend, it's because it is. What you've just witnessed are, in fact, the headlights of automobiles as they crest the long climb out of Shafter on Hwy 67 connecting Marfa and Presidio on the Rio Grande. At this distance, a good 20 miles or more, the red tail lights of cars bound south out of Marfa are virtually invisible. But headlights headed north toward Marfa stand out like beacons in the black night — and are easily mistaken and accepted as the "real thing." A good pair of high-powered binoculars should erase any lingering doubt.

Calibrating the real thing, assuming there is one, is infinitely more difficult. After all, if you've read the local lore, visited the Viewing

Area, and perhaps braved the cold desert night for a personal glimpse, you've paid your dues. You *deserve* to see the damn Lights and tell the folks back home about them, when all you may have done is primed your perceptions, which now demand some sort of satisfaction and closure. All of us travel with a mental list or itinerary which we like to check off one by one, as if notching an imaginary pistol handle with sights sampled and seen. Why should the Marfa Lights — "Been there, done that, got the T-shirt, postcard, and bumper sticker to prove it" — be any different?

Party poopers like Scott LaRoche of Katy, Texas, are less charitable in their assessments of the phenomenon. "There's one born every minute" is the polite way he puts it. LaRoche, a marketer and advertiser for a mid-sized Houston software company, has posted his own skeptical musings about the Mystery Lights on the Internet. While admitting that, compared to other New Age and end-of-the-Millennium excesses so prevalent in books and on tabloid TV these days, the Marfa Lights are a rather "harmless diversion," LaRoche remains adamant that "tourism shouldn't be based on deception. I know the lights I have seen on numerous occasions are of man-made sources. And I also know that those lights are being represented by locals and True Believers as 'mysterious,' when they're nothing of the sort."

In response to my E-mail, LaRoche elaborated. "Marfa is a poor town that desperately needs money, and there's nothing wrong with trying to attract tourists. But there are better ways to promote their town — the weather's nice, they have a world class art center, and a central location between the Davis Mountains and Big Bend [National Park]. Many people who go out there now and see what the lights really are leave with a sour taste in their mouths."

LaRoche's assessment of the disappointed visitor — based on Internet newsgroup comments — seems more personal opinion than scientific poll. In fact, it seems safe to say thousands more go away satisfied than not. "I don't have any way to put a dollar amount on it," says County Judge Jake Brisbin, Jr., "but the impact [of the Lights] on local tourism has been immense. They've been the magical hook we needed." Brisbin, 48, should know, having donned more hats already than most ranchers wear out in a lifetime, including two terms on the city council and a 1993-94 stint as mayor. Aside from his judicial robes, he is also President and General Manager of Marfa TV Cable. His wife, Cookie, is the present President of the Marfa Chamber of Commerce.

It was while Chamber President in 1987 that Brisbin suggested some sort of annual festival was in order for Marfa. "I kept coming up with different ideas," he says, "but it was my executive secretary, Dr. Celia Thompson, who insisted that the festival center around the Lights, as that was what was unique. Every little town has it apple, pecan or strawberry festival, but we had the Lights, and she was right." Since the Marfa Lights Festival was initiated, Brisbin allows, he's "been on almost every TV program you could think of, from the Today Show to Good Morning America. That's thousands of dollars in free advertising we couldn't expect otherwise."

This year's Festival, boasting 125 family-oriented booths and displays, says Cookie Brisbin, was the best yet. Budgeted at $30,000, the Festival covered costs and was able to kick back another $30,000 into the city's hard-pressed coffers.

Judge Brisbin and Dr. Thompson both bristle at the notion that there's nothing more to the Lights than wishful thinking fueled by a few mundane ranch, railroad and highway lights. "A lot of ground clutter has grown up in the last 15 years," Brisbin concedes, "but I grew up here. There weren't any lights out on the Flats when I was a kid, so if you saw something you knew you were seeing the real thing."

Thompson, who has a Ph. D. in Theater Arts and authored the definitive *The History of Marfa and Presidio County, Texas* (Eakin Press, Austin), and who also first saw the Lights as a child, concurs. "They're absolutely not all headlights," she declares. "They look like spotlights out in the pasture. They're very mobile, splitting in two, moving up and down." And while it never happened to her personally, Thompson says she's even "heard reports of people being chased by the Lights," something that would seem to be beyond the ability of automobiles on the straight and narrow.

What is known is that "evidence" for the Lights is almost wholly anecdotal, which is also largely true of reports of UFOs and Bigfoot. Consider the tale told by the late Frank X. Tolbert of the *Dallas Morning News*, who spent a disproportionate amount of his statewide beat hereabouts. (Aside to paranormal pepper aficionados: Tolbert, author of *A Bowl of Red*, was instrumental in the initiation of the annual Terlingua

Chili Cook-Off, which outdraws the Marfa Festival better than two to one.)

"In the dark of a recent morning, about 6 a.m.," Tolbert wrote, "I was tooling along on Highway 90 and 10 miles east of Marfa . . . 'The Light' . . . was above the horizon, which made it look not unlike one of the powerful landing lights of a jet airliner. [One of my companions] also described it as similar to a locomotive light.

"It would go off at intervals. In fact, I stopped twice to try to make a photograph. And each time the light promptly went out. As [Big Bend photographer] Pete Koch says, the thing is camera shy."

Even the studiously staid *Wall Street Journal* has weighed in with a front page article on the Lights (March 21, 1984). According to the article's author, David Stipp, an unnamed computer operator was driving home from work one night when he saw what he thought was another car approaching. The next thing he knew a cantaloupe-sized ball of light was hovering outside his rolled-down pickup window. He floored the gas pedal, but the light-ball stayed with him for almost two miles before finally disappearing. "Yes, I was scared," he admitted. "I was crawling out of my skin."

In March of 1973, per the *WSJ* piece, two visiting geologists assessing the likelihood of uranium deposits in the area claimed to have been startled by two similar balls of light while parked in their car. "About one-half the size of a basketball," the lights darted "behind some bushes and in front of others," hovered a few hundred feet away, and then blinked out.

The *Journal* isn't your typical supermarket check-out tabloid, and their quoted sources don't strike me as duped, I-want-my-money-back tourist types. Still, an anecdote is only reliable as the individual relating it. Shortly after one of my own articles on the subject appeared in the *San Antonio Express-News*, I received a telephone call from Charles Cude, member of a well-respected San Antonio family active in politics and business. Cude himself had been with the Alamo Funeral Home since 1945.

In the early 70s Cude's nephew, attending Sul Ross University in Alpine, kept entreating his uncle to come out and see the Lights. "You've got to see them to believe them," he would repeat. Cude finally arranged a family vacaion out west and found himself, wife and nephew parked in their car at the official viewing site, along with approximately 50 other cars. Cude was still skeptical, recognizing, he says, the college equivalent of a highschool Lover's Lane when he saw one. "The first two lights I saw," said Cude, "looked like an automobile racing across, going from east to west . . . and about that time one of these lights shot straight up. 'Oh, my gosh,' I said, 'that's what they've been talking about!'"

Thus far, save for the one light that shot straight up, Cude's account resembles a classic nocturnal automobile sighting. What happened next would appear to eliminate it from that category entirely. Lights then "started going in every direction and coming from every direction," said Cude. "Finally, this one light came toward us and passed within 50-70 feet of the car" at a speed Cude estimated in excess of 100 m.p.h. "It gave me a very eerie feeling, I assure you. The unknown kind of makes you afraid, you know? Even the hairs on the back of your neck stand up."

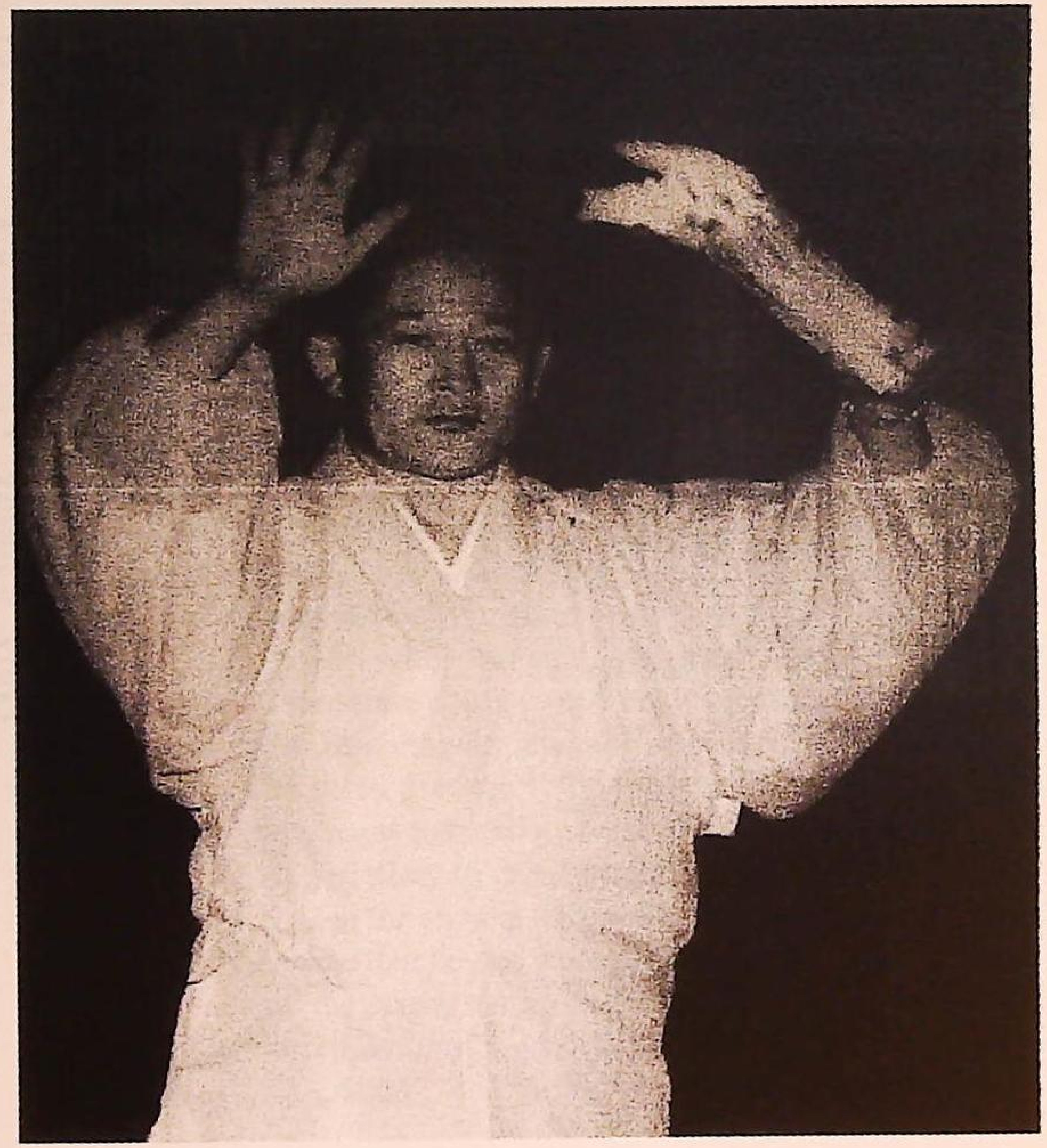
Cude compared the ball of light to a picture of the planet Earth — "with the clouds swirling all around" — that he'd recently seen on the cover of *Life* magazine. "That's exactly what this thing looked like," Cude said, "only the colors were pale green and yellow. It was about 18 to 24 inches in diameter."

Accounts like these are easily dismissible if one simply assumes they're the contemporary rural equivalent of an urban legend with mundane light sources fueling a whole host of mythic projections, fantasy and folklore. The "will to believe" in the odd and unusual — in ghost, angels, aliens and now the *chupacabras* — is so powerful that one may be forgiven for wondering whether it's not somehow hot-wired into the human central nervous system. It may "explain" why we sometimes see Venus as a flying saucer or find the face of Jesus in a flour tortilla, sheet of plywood, or rust stains on the side of a water tower. Alternatively, there's at least the possibility that reality isn't quite as settled and static as we tend to assume. Maybe there are things — not necessarily beyond the pale of knowledge — that go "bump" in the night, toward which science simply hasn't shined the spotlight of illumination.

If the Marfa Lights were an isolated incident, for example, one might be encouraged to write them off as a combination of small town, snake-oil hucksterism, city-slicker gullibility and sensory misperception, the One Born Every Minute Syndrome. The fact of the matter, though, is that so-called "ghost lights" have a long and honorable tradition around the world.

In October of 1765, for example, traveling by coach from Frankfurt to Leipzig, Germany, a 16-year-old boy glanced out a window to his right and saw a ravine "wonderfully illuminated" like an amphitheater. "In a funnel-shaped space," he wrote later, "there were innumerable little lights gleaming, ranged step-fashioned over one another; and they shone so brilliantly that the eye was dazzled." He didn't know if he was witnessing "a pandemonium of will-o'-the-wisps, or a company of luminous creatures." It seems unlikely that the young boy would have been so startled by nothing more mysterious than, say, a flock of fireflies, as he was none other than Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832), the celebrated German dramatist, poet and scientist.

Will-o'-the-wisp is but one of several names used to describe luminous nocturnal balls of light. Others include spooklights, swamp gas, jack-o'-lantern, cemetery lights, corpse candles, friar's lantern, *ignis fatuus* (Latin for "foolish fire"), and fireships (when seen at sea). Interestingly, the dictionary's second definition of *ignis fatuus* is "Something that misleads or deludes; an illusion."



When Nippon-TV did a segment on the Lights, they brought along a Buddhist monk (left) who almost caught the prairie on fire, according to Big Bend Sentinel *editor Robert Halpern). NBC's "Unsolved Mysteries" series recreated Hallie Stillwell's historical sighting (above).*

Both photos used with the permission of the Big Bend Sentinel.

As in the case of the Marfa Lights, the phenomenon is often associated with a particular place or geographical feature. In western Queensland, Australia, they're known as the Min Min Lights, for a small creek and the frontier town that once stood on its banks. Venezeula has its Lake Maracaibo Lights. Across the border in Canada, lights have been reported on a regularly recurring basis near Taber, Alberta. Two of the more famous spooklights in this country are the Brown Mountain Lights of North Carolina and the Hornet Light of northeastern Oklahoma, the former dating to at least 1850. The latter is sometimes referred to as the Tri-State Light, denoting the meeting of Oklahoma with Kansas and Missouri. It's reported to haunt a stretch of isolated country road known locally as the "Devil's Promenade." Lights have also been seen along the Connecticut River in the Northeast. Two other sites in Texas — Esperanza Creek and Bragg Road, near Saratoga, in the Big Thicket — have also long been associated with ghost lights.

Mainstream science has only rarely looked at the phenomenon, typically with little enthusiasm (too superstition-tinged) and even less success. Because of their outdoor and elusive, transient nature, spooklights hardly make for the ideal laboratory rat or petri dish. Scientists like things that remain completely *still*, or that can be easily replicated on demand. Despite some claims of almost nightly regularity, as at Marfa, spooklights seem to enjoy an existence all their own, probably because they depend on several interlocking factors for their generation, possibly geological, electrical and meteorological in nature. Classic swamp gas, for instance, is thought to arise under certain circumstances from the spontaneous combustion of methane, a byproduct of decomposing vegetation. But if it were really that straightforward, virtually every garden and compost pile in the South would now be haunted by their own personal ghost light, attracting the attention of both Martha Stewart and Dave Barry if no one else. Stewart would long ago have come up with a way to harness swamp gas for outdoor lighting ("Its diffuse glow lends an otherwise lacking subtlety to the poinsettia"), whereas Barry would have found free fodder for another column ("Can you think of a four-letter word for methane that begins with an F?").

Oddly enough, the scientist who seems to have put the most time into the subject is a professor of physics from the University of Waseda, Tokyo. Yoshi-Hiko Ohtsuki — I've heard him referred to as Japan's Arthur C. Clarke, a popularizer of scientific mysteries probably second only to the late Carl Sagan — has made two treks to west Texas in search of the Marfa Lights. When I bumped into him in March of 1989, he was in the middle of filming a documentary to be shown on Nippon-TV later that year. Aside from video crew and technicians, Ohtsuki also had in tow a Buddhist priest who summarily lit a series of ritualistic candles, presumably in an effort to summon up the spirit of the Lights. "They almost caught the whole prairie on fire," said *Sentinel* editor Halpern of the ceremony, conducted in a rippling wind not uncommon to Marfa that time of year.

Ohtsuki and colleagues have now collected more than 2,100 sightings of "mystery lights" worldwide, the majority of which the physicist thinks can probably be attributed to ball lightning, a contoversial scientific topic in its own right. Only a quarter of a century ago, no self-respecting atmospheric scientist would have given ball lightning the time of day, let alone of night. Nowadays, ball lightning is the subject of symposia and books, and Ohtsuki even claims to have created it in his laboratory, albeit on an extremely small scale lasting only for seconds. His own theory is that ball lightning is a type of plasma, a highly ionized gas that represents a fourth state, or phase, of matter distinct from solids, liquids and normal gases. Plasma, in fact, is the predominant form of matter in the Universe, although one doesn't normally expect to encounter it floating about on the surface of a planet.

As its name implies, ball lightning is typically associated with thunderstorms or at least storm-like conditions, although how it arises and is then able to maintain its circular form over time is a matter of conjecture. Nor should it be confused with St. Elmo's Fire, which is a coronal discharge of static electricity from a sharp point, such as a ship's mast or church steeple.

Ball lightning also has the disturbing characteristic of manifesting inside closed structures like houses, and, on at least one occasion, inside an airplane. Aboard Eastern Airlines flight EA 539 from New York to Washington a few years ago, passengers were suddenly startled when "a glowing sphere a little more than 20 centimeters [in] diameter" abruptly emerged from the pilot's cabin and proceeded to "stroll" at a rather leisurely pace down the aircraft's middle aisle. It was bluish-white in color, with an almost solid appearance.

One of many passengers on the jet just happened to be Roger Jennison, a professor of electronics at Kent University, England, who passed his eyewitness account along to physicist Paul Davies, now a professor of natural philosophy (and prolific author) at the University of Adelaide, South Australia. Summarizing the ball lightning phenomenon for the English science weekly, *New Scientist*, Davies had this to say:

"A typical ball is about 25 centimeters [10 inches] in diameter and glows a pale red or orange color. It may have a halo, or corona, around it. Sometimes, it emits sparks or rays. These balls materialize — if that is the word — literally out of the blue, or perhaps out of the clouds. They can last for anything up to a minute or more before extinguishing. The mode of their demise varies. Some balls explode violently. Others, like the proverbial old soldiers, don't die but simply fade away."

Are the Marfa Lights a localized form of ball lightning, then, generated when the wind blows just right and the air is saturated with electrically-charged dust particles and other natural aerosols? Or, as skeptics like LaRoche say, are they nothing more miraculous than halogen lamps and maybe the odd mirage or two?

Regardless of their origin and reality, the Mysterious Marfa Lights have achieved, if not immortality, celebrityhood with a capital C. Apart from the already mentioned roadside park, highway sign, historical marker, annual festival, numerous TV appearances, and Hollywood sex symbol connections — Taylor, Hudson and Dean — the Lights now have their very own Web page (http://www.marfalights.com/gallery.html), a sure sign of arrival — in Cyberspace, if nowhere else. The site consists of local testimonials and two Quicktime video clips. Unfortunately for believers, both clips are of automobile headlights in this author's humble opinion. Moreover, Chinati is repeatedly misspelled as Chianti, an Italian mountain range noted for its red table wines. Maybe too much Chianti and firewater is the ultimate answer and maybe it isn't. Next year I'll have to talk to the Bud Gals in person afterhours. They're not allowed to drink on duty.

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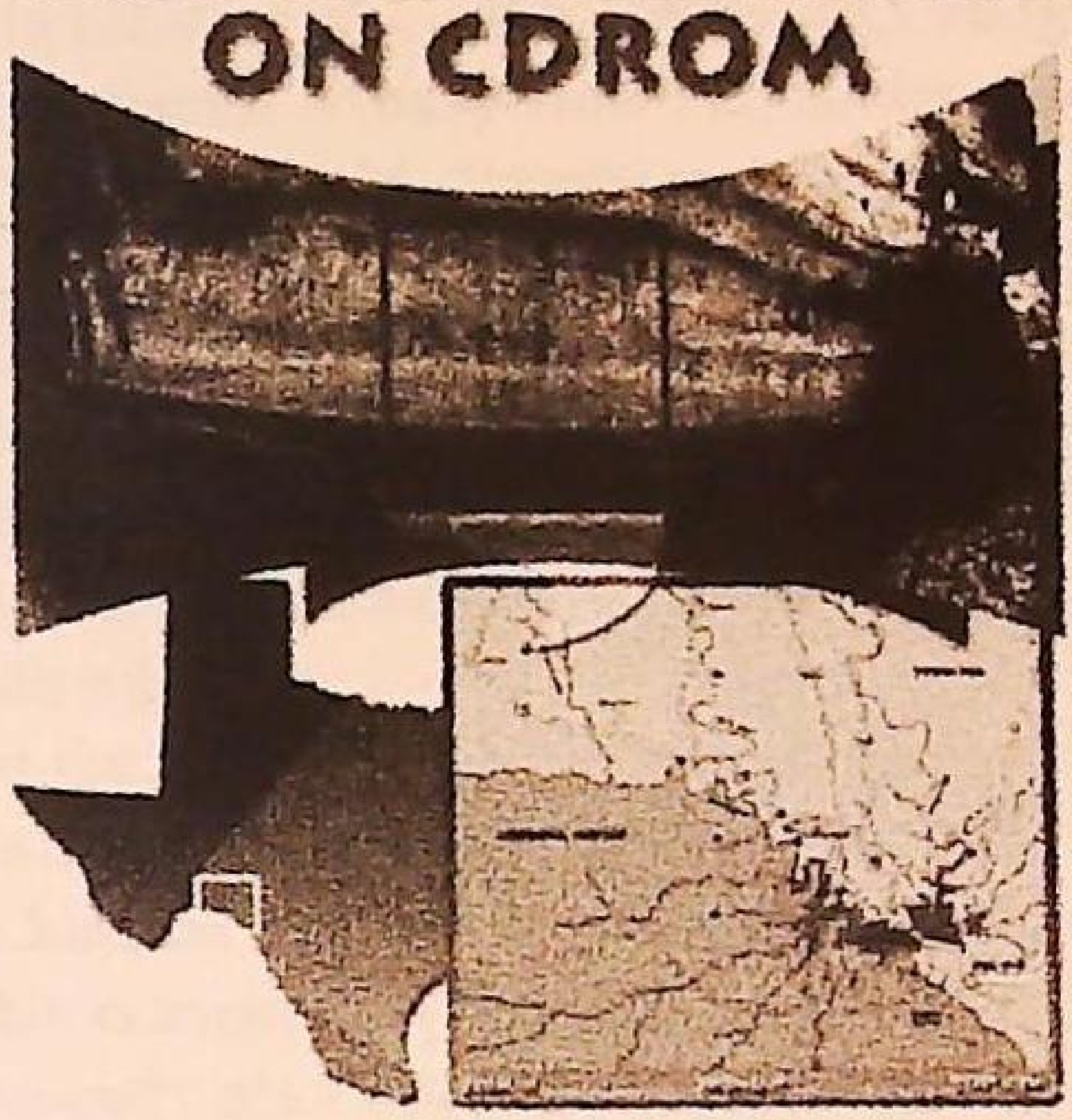

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Cotton Mather and the Case of the Floating Girl

by Richard J. Ravalli, Jr.

In November of 1688, when Cotton Mather took the troubled youth Martha Goodwin into his three-story Boston home, he realized only one thing could rid her of the afflictions she had recently come under: fervent prayer, accompanied with many tears. She and three other children of mason John Goodwin had begun behaving very strangely, apparently the victims of witchcraft. Around midsummer of that year, the "tortures" that befell the children first manifested. Spontaneous deafness, dumbness, blindness, tongues being "pull'd out upon their chins," jaws and shoulder blades popping out of joints, loud cries and various other phenomena were all witnessed by many amazed observers.[1] When Mather attempted to pray with one of the Goodwin daughters, she became deaf, and her hearing did not return until the prayer was over. For the young Puritan minister, only one agency could be the cause for such disheartening horrors: the devil, and his legions of demons.

Cotton Mather was a pious New England clergyman of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries who believed strongly in the reality of the supernatural. The invisible world was inhabited and ruled over by the Judeo-Christian God, who through providence worked miraculously in *this* world in various ways to further his divine and prophetic plan. Lesser beings also inhabited the supernatural realm. These included the holy angels, and those angels which have fallen from their heavenly place, the devil and demonic spirits. Also thrown into this otherworldly mix are witches, who, while being normal, corporeal humans, wield supernatural abilities (provided by demonic spirits, for the witch had no power in and of herself, so it was thought) thanks to their pacts made with Satan.

Mather's convictions about the existence of these lesser spiritual forces ran deep. He wrote extensively on the subject, composing major works on witchcraft and reports of supernatural events, and, when needed, dedicated his own time to the continuing battle of spiritual warfare, as in the Goodwin case. Whether it be praying with a convicted witch in a jail cell, or bringing a demonically oppressed person into his home for prolonged prayer and assistance, he felt he had many encounters with the spirits of darkness throughout his ministry. Mather wished to publish his cases of the supernatural largely to combat what he saw as the growing skepticism of his day. But while most of the evidence he offered unbelievers for the invisible world no doubt involved easily explainable psychological phenomena so common in witchcraft cases of old, at least one of Mather's incidences of demonic oppression contained a tantalizing mixture of heated controversy, allegations of sexual abuse--and documented occurrences of levitation. What follows below is an examination of Cotton Mather and Margaret Rule.

Seventeenth century New Englanders definitely inhabited a spiritually charged world. Spirits manifested in houses, comets signaled God's impending judgement, and "monster" babies were born. Armies of men appeared in the air, spectral dogs haunted people, and anomalous objects rained from the sky. Rainbows were a supernatural sign, as were sudden deaths and talking babies. [2] They also believed in tales of Satan having his way with sinners. One account (from England) tells of a man who,

"in the middest of his health-drinking and carrousing in a Tavern, drank a health to the Devil, saying, That if the devil would not come, and pledge him, he would not believe there was either God or devil: whereupon his companions strucken with horror, hastened out of the room, and presently after hearing a hideous noise, and smelling a stinking savour, the Vinter ran up into the Chamber: and coming in, he missed his guest, and found the window broken, the Iron barre in it bowed, and all bloody, but the man was never heard of afterwards."[3]

A "phantom ship" was witnessed regularly by the citizens of New Haven. One man reported a "strange black cloud" and then saw a man appear, "in arms complete standing with his legs straddling and having a pike in his hands..." The odd aerial fellow then vanished and in his place a "spacious ship" appeared, "seeming under sail though she kept the same station."[4] Two servants in Roxbury drowned because they went out at night to gather oysters, "a dreadful example of God's displeasure against obstinate servants."[5]

These were all tales of "wonder." According to David D. Hall, a wonder was distinct from a miracle in strict theological terms, "though in everyday discourse, and even among the ministry, the two words became interchangeable."[6] These wonder tales were circulated widely throughout Europe and in the New England colony. Besides being transmitted orally, they appeared in many written sources, from cheaply printed broadsides, pamphlets and ballads, to collections in large books. "The same events occur repeatedly," writes Hall. "Tales of witchcraft and the Devil, of comets, hailstorms, monster births, and apparitions--these were some of the most commonplace."[7] Some of the most influential of the English-born books were Thomas Beard's *The Theatre of Gods Judgements* (1597) and Samuel Clarke's *A Mirror or Looking Glass both for Saints, and Sinners, Held forth in about two thousand Examples: Wherein is presented, as God's Wonderful Mercies to the one, so his severe Judgements against the other* (1648). Both went through multiple printings and their contents were well known in seventeenth-century New England. [8] Cotton Mather and his father, the great minister Increase Mather, were by no means bystanders in the tradition of wonder lore. The senior pastor produced his collection of American miracle accounts in 1684 titled *Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*. [9]

The Mathers were simply two of many at the time who represented a bridge between older supernaturalism and the dawning scientific world. The rise of natural philosophy in England and the founding of the Royal Society in 1662 led to many early "scientists" who sought to investigate and catalog all types of phenomena in the world, whether they be natural or supernatural. [10] Those like Joseph Glanville wished to examine cases of supposed spirit incarnations (like the famous "Drummer Boy" of Tidworth) in order to objectively prove the existence of evil spirits. Increase was no doubt influenced by these types of beliefs when he wrote of a mysterious stone-throwing episode in New Hampshire in 1682 in order to show skeptics "the real existence of apparitions, spirits and witches."[11] This reliance on empirical modes of thinking about the supernatural was quickly and dramatically picked up by the younger Cotton.

Cotton Mather was born on February 12, 1663. [12] He was named after his grandfather on his mother Maria's side, the great Puritan minister John Cotton. Cotton's grandfather on his father's side was Richard Mather, also an eminent Puritan minister. From the beginning, then, Cotton came from proper stock to be a major New England Puritan authority. As a child he buried himself in Scripture, reading "for a time nothing less than fifteen chapters a day, divided into morning, noon, and night exercises."[13] For formal studying he attended a Boston public school, supplemented by he and his father's own studies at home. By eleven, Cotton had read widely in the classics, had gone through much of the Greek New Testament text, began Hebrew grammar, and "spoke Latin 'so readily' that he could not only write notes of sermons as the preacher spoke in church, but even write them in Latin while the preacher spoke in English."[14]

In 1674, Cotton passed entrance examinations for Harvard and entered at the age of eleven and a half, becoming the youngest student admitted in the school's history. After graduating four years later, he began to assist his father in preaching at Boston's North Church, as well as serving as his amanuensis, copying sermons and transcribing manuscript portions. Cotton received constant praises for his work. He considered offers from others to preach in New Haven, but turned those down to stay with his father at North Church. After a long and intense process of self-examination in these years, Cotton was prepared for the ministry. He was officially ordained as a pastor on Wednesday the 13th, 1685.

Mather's first major run-in with the devil and opportunity to intellectually refute the Sadducees of his day was the Goodwin case mentioned above. However, in his personal dealings with the supernatural, Mather was just as moved by genuine Christian compassion to help those whom he felt were going through horrible trials as he was by finding opportunities to show off his scholarly acumen and disprove skepticism. It was in such a spirit that he took Martha Goodwin into his home, three years after his ordination. Her and her siblings' sufferings began after an Irish washerwoman named Goodwife Glover (a "scandalous old woman" with a reputation for witchcraft) reportedly cursed her.[15] Goodwife Glover was soon brought to jail under suspicion of witchcraft and her house searched, where it was discovered that she kept small magic dolls made of rags and stuffed with goat's hair. According to Mather, "When these were produced the vile woman acknowledged that her way to torment the objects of her malice was by wetting her finger with spittle and stroking of those little images."[16] Mather did attempt to convert Glover (who appears to have truly been a black magician) twice while she awaited execution for witchcraft, but to no avail. She was later executed, but the sufferings of the Goodwin children continued.

Thanks to the continued prayers of Mather and others, the children were all eventually set free from their demonic troubles some four to five weeks later. The strange and dramatic episode led to Mather's first book-length publication, a wonder book if there ever was one: *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*, published in 1689. It went through three editions and was widely praised by Puritans everywhere.[17] Richard Baxter in England wrote that any skeptic "that will read...Mr Cotton Mather's book of the witchcrafts in New England may see enough to silence any incredulity that pretendeth to be rational."[18] Here was the spiritual evidence Mather craved. The book may have also had an effect upon the events at Salem in 1692. [19]

While Mather clearly had a bias in his supernatural investigations, he did also attempt some level of care and objectivity with his evidence. The Goodwin case helped confirm for Mather that one needed to be careful in handling cases of witchcraft, because in the process, due to the Devil's skills at being the Father of Lies, innocent people could be named as practitioners of witchcraft by the afflicted, thus foreseeing the events at Salem. So he kept to himself any people named by Goodwife Glover or Martha Goodwin. Also, in the "Discourse on Witchcraft" that Mather preached to his congregation during the case, he warned against the use of spectral evidence, or supposed apparitions of witches that appeared to afflicted persons to torment them, as the Devil could appear as an innocent person to bring them undo harm.[20]

Mather also presented objective documentation of wondrous phenomena, the most notable of which for the purposes of this article comes from the case of Margaret Rule. It indeed seems true that many of the so-called demonic manifestations from seventeenth-century America (including Salem) can be satisfactorily explained through a combination of suggestion, psychosomatic illnesses, pathological hysteria and other psychological conditions, including outright lying.[21] But what occurred during the Rule case may not be so easily explained. Writers since Mather's day seem to be at a logical loss to explain the most dramatic events: the times when Rule floated high above her bed for all to see.

Margaret Rule is described by Mather as a young woman from north Boston with an alleged troubled and sinful childhood, but who had recently "become seriously concern'd for the everlasting Salvation of her Soul." [22] On the 10th of December in 1693, after repeated disturbances during a church service, the girl "fell into odd fits" and had to be carried away. After a few hours Rule's symptoms were determined to be spiritually caused, and a woman who lived nearby who practiced white magic was suspected. Margaret said she saw a total of eight specters tormenting her, but Mather instructed her only to tell the names of those she could see the faces of (for the rest "came still with their faces covered") to him privately. She also reported seeing the infamous "Black Man," or Satan, so common in witchcraft cases, as well as a "White Spirit," an angel, who told Margaret to look up to Mather as her spiritual father. However, at one point she also reportedly saw *Mather's* image attempting to harm her, which greatly distressed the minister until he successfully prayed for it to go away from her. [23]

Rule had a whole range of physical distresses. Her joints would be distorted, she would go into convulsions, and she was "pinched with invisible hands" which created visible black and blue marks. She also had her jaws supposedly forced open invisibly and had spectral brimstone poured into her throat. Witnesses swore they smelled the invisible substance, and many of them were reportedly ready to testify that the stench throughout the room was so strong they could barely endure it. I feel all of these phenomena may be explained through the more traditional psychological routes, but what also happened during Rule's "exorcism" cannot be so dismissed. Chadwick Hansen, quoting the Mather account, notes, "'Once,' said Mather, 'her tormentors pulled her up to the ceiling of the chamber and held her there before a very numerous company of spectators, who found it as much as they could all do to pull her down again.' Mather obtained signed confirmations of this and other instances of levitation."[24] Below are the testimonies which Mather collected:

> I do Testifie that I have seen Margaret Rule in her Afflictions from the Invisible World, lifted up from her Bed, wholly by an Invisible force, a great way towards the top of the Room where she lay; in her being so lifted, she had no Assistance from any use of her own Arms or Hands, or any other part of her Body, not so much as her Heels

touching her Bed, or resting on any support whatsoever. And I have seen her thus lifted, when not only a strong Person hath throw his whole weight a cross her to pull her down; but several other Persons have endeavoured, with all their might, to hinder her from being so raised up, which I suppose that several others will testifie as well as my self, when call'd unto it. Witness my Hand,

Sameul Aves.

We can also Testifie to the substance of what is above Written, and have several times seen Margaret Rule so lifted up from her Bed, as that she had no use of her own Lims to help her up, but it was the declared apprehension of us, as well as others who saw it, impossible for any hands, but some of the Invisible World to life her.

Copia

Robert Earle. John Wilkins. Dan. Williams.

We whose Names are under-writted do testifie, That one Evening when we were in the Chamber where Margaret Rule then lay, in her late Affliction, we observed her to be, by an other support, but were also by the same force, lifted up from all that was under her, and all this for a considerable while, we judg'd it several Minutes; and it was as much as several of us could do, with all our strength to pull her down. All which happened when there was not only two in the Chamber, but we suppose ten or a dozen more, whose Names we have forgotten,

Copia.

Thomas Thornton.

William Hudson Testifies to the substance of Thortons Testimony, to which he also hath set his Hand.

Boston, Jan. 18, 1693.[25]

Eventually, after prolonged prayer and fasting, Rule too was set free from her oppressors. However, even armed with evidence for the amazing phenomena that occurred during the ordeal, Mather never published his account of the episode, titled *Another Brand Plucked Out of the Burning*. It was simply too close to the time of Salem to do that. As footnoted earlier, publishing it would be left to Mather's contemporary and skeptical arch enemy Robert Calef, who included the essay along with exchanges between Mather and himself right around the time of the events, which the above testimonies are a part of, in his 1700 work *More Wonders From the Invisible World*. Did Calef assert that Mather and others made up the levitation story and that it never occurred? Apparently an outright charge of lying would have been a libel that even Calef did not want to be charged with, for he clearly was not against making wild accusations against his enemy, including the baseless charge that Mather enjoyed *fondling Rule's breasts*, which most modern historians would reject. [26] What was Calef's response then? Let us take a closer look.

Calef is somewhat of a mysterious person historically. According to Hansen, "He seems to have been a weaver, although he liked to give himself the more dignified title of merchant. He was a frequenter of the Boston coffee houses, and he fancied himself a wit."[27] Apparently Calef only visited Margaret Rule one night on September 13, and then wrote up a report on his view of what ailed the girl. He felt Rule was essentially a hoaxer who used possession to play out youthful sexual desires. While some skeptical minded folks may agree with that type of interpretation of the events, how does one account for the reported incidences of levitation (included as part of Mather's response to Calef's criticism), which apparently did not occur during Calef's visit?

Calef made two major responses, and I feel both are as weak as his charge of sexual impropriety. The first is as follows:

> And besides the above Letter, you were pleased to send me another Paper containing several Testimonies of the

> Possessed being lifted up, and held a space of several Minutes to the Garret floor, etc., but they omit giving the account, whether after she was down they bound her down: or kept holding her: And related not how many were to pull her down, which hinders the knowledge what number they must be to be stronger than an Invisible Force. [28]

First, why should it matter exactly how many people attempted to pull Rule down from the ceiling after her levitation? The testimonies are clear that it took "several" individuals to do this, which I take to mean at least three--do we really need an exact number in order to trust the accounts? After all, it must have been a very strange experience for the Puritan witnesses if it occurred, and while they gave other details in their written accounts they may have been too stunned to remember and record the exact number on every occasion. (Plus, Mather may have called upon them to record their testimonies briefly and quickly in order to respond to Calef.) The same goes for the other particular as to whether or not Rule was bound after being pulled from the ceiling. The writers seem much more interested in making the general point that the phenomenon did indeed occur and that it could not be explained naturalistically. Thus, some details were simply deemed not sworn to at the time. Basically, I do not see how this response of Calef's disproves the events as actually having occurred, if that is indeed the critic's point. By all accounts, Mather was a honest and sincere, if sometimes misguided, Puritan religious figure, and Calef attempted to slander him. Thus we have every reason to not believe that the Boston divine was involved in some type of hoaxing conspiracy, and every reason to doubt his enemy's logic.

Calef's second response to the Rule levitations involved an argument based upon anti-Catholic bias, an odd one even for the Puritan days of colonial New England. He continued:

> Upon the whole, I suppose you expect I should believe it; and if so, the only advantage gain'd, is that which has been so long controverted between Protestants and Papists, whether Miracles are ceast, will hereby seem to be decided for the latter; it being, for ought I can see, if so, as true a Miracle as for Iron to swim, and that the Devil can work such Miracles. [29]

If I read Calef's point correctly, accepting the Rule levitation accounts would mean that Catholic miracle working theology (described as "Heathenish and Popish Superstitions") would be true, so he will not accept it. Obviously, even if such an idea were true and Catholicism was somehow proved by the evidence, that does not mean the events did not take place. This is nothing but Calef's religious bias, which the objective observer need not consider. Moreover, while many Christian authorities since the Reformation doubted whether miracles were for today, as the tradition of wonders aptly illustrates, many Protestants, even Puritans, had no spiritual problems accepting stories of the miraculous.

Few modern historians and writers on colonial witchcraft (who generally do not deal with questions regarding the reality of supposed supernatural phenomena) have attempted to address the Rule case on this matter. Hansen offers the notion that the "levitations" could be the well documented *arc de cercle* he describes throughout his work to help explain witchcraft cases. This is a convulsive fit where a sufferer from pathological hysteria arcs their back in an extreme position in which only the head and the feet touch the ground or bed. [30] But even Hansen realizes that this, mixed with the power of suggestion, may be reaching for an explanation of the witnesses clear testimonies that Rule's feet did not touch the bed whatsoever.

One might object that one of the testimonies contradicts Mather, who said that "once" Rule levitated as opposed to this happening "several times" according to another. A few things can be said. First, the wording of "once" in Mather's original account does not necessarily preclude other instances of levitation having occurred. The author was simply describing one event among many that took place which he felt were strange and wondrous events. What seems to be the case here is that after more thought and the debates with Calef, Mather singled out the levitations as indeed very strong evidences for something unnatural having occurred, thus collecting the testimonies in the first place to respond to his critic. Also, it is possible Mather was only present for one instance of levitation as opposed to others who saw it happen more than once. (As far as I can tell, the record is unclear as to whether Mather took Rule into *his* home as he had done in the past, or whether she stayed someplace else for constant care and observation. Even if the former is the case, it is still possible for Mather to not have been present during every levitation.) I am inclined to think that the sole description of "several times" is not simply an exaggeration, mainly because the accounts do not otherwise seem given to wild hyperbole and all describe the same "basic" event.

In the end, I believe the evidence shows to date that we have from Cotton Mather a clear historical case of levitation and ultimately unexplained events. We have multiple witnesses testimony likely involving more than one instance of levitation and apparently written down shortly after the events transpired. These come from relatively trustworthy sources who we have no reason to believe were involved in a conspiracy or hoax. (I feel we can also easily discount the notion that Rule was somehow involved in faking these occurrences.) We also have the testimonies filtered through the eye of a contemporary skeptic who, as demonstrated above, did nothing to prove the events did not transpire as recorded. As far as can be presently told by this author, this is indeed strong historical evidence for a particular strange phenomenon. The common assumption within this branch of the unexplained that anecdotes involving levitation "are all subject to many factors--from misperception and undetected fraud to inaccuracies of memory--that render them unreliable as evidence for extraordinary phenomena"[31] should perhaps be reconsidered.

Parapsycholgists may offer a psychokenesis theory, for we see the "troubled youngster" in Margaret Rule, so much an ingredient of modern poltergeist cases. An equally mysterious spiritual theory is also present (unless, naturally, one assumes beforehand that such a theory is not a viable one). Whatever the case may be, until further evidence to the contrary, the story of Cotton Mather and the troubled girl from north Boston belongs in the realm of paranormal discussion. Mather may be satisfied to have confused the skeptics in the end with his wondrous case, but only if young Margaret truly found peace within her soul.

ENDNOTES

1 Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences*, in *America Firsthand, Volume 1: From Settlement to Reconstruction*, eds. Robert D. Marcus and David Burner (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 45-46.

2 David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), ch. 2.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 270.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 73; 81.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

11 The Editors of Time-Life, *Hauntings* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1989), p. 60.

12 Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 6. I am indebted to this excellent book for all biographical information on Mather contained here.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft At Salem* (New York: George Braziller, 1969), p. 20.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

17 Silverman, pp. 86-87.

18 Hansen, p. 28.

19 Silverman, p. 87. Mather was largely involved indirectly with the Salem Trials, being too ill to attend at the time, although he was present at one of the hangings on August 19. He did support the judges in their effort (many were close friends of his), and did feel that at least some real witches were being justly put to death at Salem. However, for reasons listed below, he was critical of many of the trial methods, feeling that true confession should be the only absolute marker for a witch. If perhaps muddled, his attempts at restraint in the trials should be part of any proper understanding of Cotton Mather's involvement in this tragic episode in American history. Also interesting to note is that it is largely due to the social fallout from Salem that the notion of direct demonic possession, or supernatural activity apart from the workings of witches and witchcraft, became more popular with Mather after 1692, although he never abandoned the belief that real witches did work their craft in the world. See Hansen, pp. 198-199. For more on discussions of bewitchment versus possession in the seventeenth century and how they were involved in the Salem events, see David Harley, "Explaining Salem: Calvinist Psychology and the Diagnosis of Possession," *American Historical Review*, April 1996, pp. 306-330.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

21 For a brief and up-to-date discussion of some of these issues, see James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* 4th ed (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000), pp. 28-35. The popular pre-twentieth century theory of hoaxing by the Salem girls has made somewhat of a return in recent years in

the work of Bernard Rosenthal. See his *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

22 Mather's account of the Rule case, *Another Brand Plucked Out of the Burning*, was published in 1700 by Robert Calef as part of his criticism of Mather titled *More Wonders of the Invisible World*. Both appear in George Lincoln Burr's classic anthology, *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases: 1648-1706* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914). The Rule case begins on page 310. (Burr's volume is also available online at http://etext.lib.virginia.edu.) More will be said on Calef below. For a secondary account of the Rule case, see Hansen, pp. 178-185.

23 Hansen, pp. 180-181.

24 Hansen, p. 183.

25 *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, in Burr, pp. 337-338. As Burr notes, this was 1693 of the Puritan calendar and 1694 of ours (p. 341).

26 For example, see Hansen, pp. 191-192.

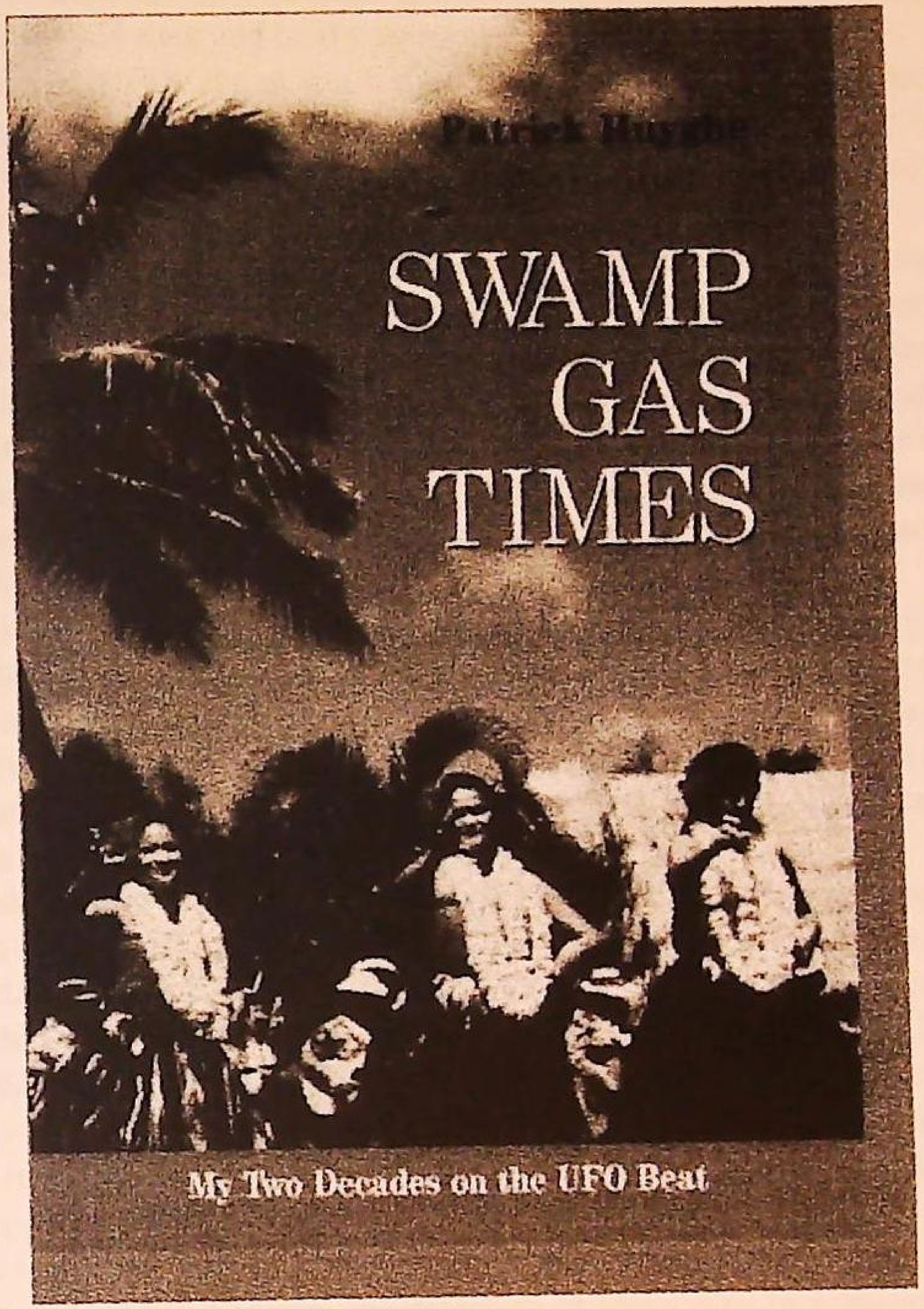
27 Hansen, p. 190.

28 Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, in Burr, p. 340.

29 *Ibid*.

30 Hansen, pp. 184-185.

31 Leonard George, *Alternative Realities: The Paranormal, The Mystic and the Transcendent in Human Experience* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), p. 153.



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Is HIV really the cause of AIDS?

By Henry Bauer

Kary Mullis won a Nobel Prize for inventing the technique of PCR (polymerase chain reaction) that is used by everyone in molecular biology, genetic engineering, forensic science – by anyone who analyzes DNA. In his autobiography, Mullis (2000) reports that for 15 years he asked in vain for references to peer-reviewed publications demonstrating that AIDS is infectious and that HIV is its cause. Finally he was able to ask someone who would certainly know, the man who first discovered the virus later called HIV, Luc Montagnier:

> Montagnier suggested, "Why don't you reference the CDC [Centers for Disease Control] report?"
>
> "I read it," I said, "That doesn't really address the issue of whether or not HIV is the probable cause of AIDS, does it?"
>
> He agreed with me. It was damned irritating. If Montagnier didn't know the answer, who the hell did?

Besides Mullis there are other competent and informed scientists who do not believe that HIV has been shown to be the cause of AIDS; but one would not know that from the coverage of AIDS in the media. Yet the possibility is of an importance that can hardly be exaggerated: people found to be HIV-positive are "treated" with drugs that have very unpleasant side-effects, indeed are toxic (as well as exceedingly expensive); and the United Nations has proposed a multi-billion-dollar program that would provide such drugs to even more people.

Here are some of the salient points that cast doubt on a causal connection between HIV and AIDS. (I can do no more than just raise these points here; at the end, I will suggest further reading that gives chapter and verse to these and additional points.)

Predictions have persistently been wrong, when based on the belief that AIDS is infectious and caused by HIV.

Fifteen years ago, our society came close to panic under the belief that this sexually transmitted disease, invariably fatal within a short time, would soon spread into the general population. That has not happened (Fumento 1990). The same groups are at risk as before: chiefly promiscuous gay men and heavy users of "recreational" drugs.

In the mid-1980s, the media were full of dire predictions that Thailand's population would be decimated by AIDS (Duesberg, 1996: 289). Instead, the incidence of HIV infection there is now estimated at only 2.15% (Anon., 2000: 19).

Announcing the discovery of HIV, Robert Gallo promised that within a year there would be a vaccine to protect against AIDS. Fifteen years later, there is no vaccine. The estimated time from infection by HIV to development of full-scale AIDS, and from then to death, has grown steadily longer. In the early 1980s, only months were supposed to intervene between infection and death; now the estimate, for otherwise healthy individuals, is as much as *two decades*!

Unlike with all other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), being a female prostitute is not a risk factor for contracting AIDS. Attempts to explain away this incongruity have produced a variety of bizarre suggestions over the years; recently, for instance, that continual exposure to HIV might serve to immunize – but apparently only female prostitutes, not male prostitutes or promiscuous gay males!

Teenage girls in Britain have the highest rate of pregnancy and STDs in Western Europe; but the STDs they experience are gonorrhea, chlamydia, and genital warts *and not HIV* (Lockwood, 2000); indeed Britain has a very low incidence of HIV at 0.11% (Anon. 2000: 19).

A number of suggestions have been made – including by Luc Montagnier – that AIDS results only if "co-factors" are present in addition to HIV infection. But more than a decade of investigation has failed to discover these postulated factors.

The tests "for HIV" are actually tests for *antibodies* to HIV. But in the case of other diseases, the detection of antibodies in apparently healthy people is taken as an indication that infection has been successfully vanquished by the immune system. Why not with HIV-AIDS?

Moreover the tests are not even specific for HIV antibodies: *dozens of other conditions yield positive "HIV" tests*. False positives are given by – *among other things* – blood transfusions, Epstein-Barr virus, flu, flu vaccination, hemophilia, hepatitis, herpes, leprosy, malaria, multiple myeloma, organ transplantation, other retroviruses, rheumatoid arthritis, tuberculosis…

The statistics about HIV and AIDS from various sources differ wildly. To give just one example: in 1999, WHO (World Health Organization) recorded a cumulative total of 800,000 AIDS cases in Africa (as against 700,000 in the U.S.) whereas the Joint United Nations Program on HIV-AIDS (UNAIDS) claimed 14 million *deaths* from AIDS and 23 million people now infected with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa (Jones 2000).

The media fail to include in their sensationalist coverage of African AIDS the fact that in Africa, "AIDS" is diagnosed on the basis of the Bangui definition: diarrhea, fever, and weight loss – conditions anything but unique to AIDS. The Bangui definition (WHO 1986; Quinn et al. 1986: 961 & Table 5) was evolved because facilities for clinical testing are lacking in so much of Africa. Any statistics about "HIV infection" in Africa are based at most on very small samples extrapolated a long way, at worst on the presumption that everyone with diarrhea, fever, and weight loss is an HIV-AIDS victim.

HIV and AIDS are nowadays linked *by definition*: the CDC classifies people as AIDS victims only if they harbor HIV. However, when the AIDS epidemic was first identified, diagnosis was based on immune-system deficiencies and the occurrence of otherwise rare, opportunistic infections, Kaposi's sarcoma being one of the most prominent. After the discovery of HIV, however, the CDC diagnostic criteria were altered so that people with damaged immune systems are no longer diagnosed as having AIDS if they are not also HIV-positive; they are now said to suffer from "idiopathic CD4-T-cell lymphopenia" (Root-Bernstein 1995), which means "immune system lacking CD4 cells for some unknown reason" – which meant "AIDS", before the announced discovery of HIV.

The CDC has, in point of fact, altered its diagnostic criteria several times. Had it not done so, the incidence of AIDS in the United States would have started to decrease even before the early 1990s.

Regarding Kaposi's sarcoma, it is also worth noting that this supposed opportunistic infection, virtually the trademark of AIDS when the epidemic first surfaced, is now rare among AIDS cases and is no longer listed by the CDC as an HIV disease (Duesberg 1996: 463).

No one has explained how HIV damages the immune system.

When a virus, composed of DNA plus protein, invades a cell, it captures the cell's reproductive mechanisms which are normally controlled by the cell's own DNA (in the chromosomes of the cell's nucleus). The viral DNA then copies itself, producing more virus particles. Eventually the cell breaks up and the new virus particles are freed to invade more cells. The virus multiplies and cells die thereby.

A *retro*virus like HIV is composed of RNA, not DNA. When it invades a cell, it uses the enzyme "reverse transcriptase" to produce DNA that is incorporated into the cell's chromosomes. To produce more retrovirus, that DNA must then produce RNA. But that is the normal manner of operation when cells divide or when they make proteins. How would that kill the cell? That question has been incessantly asked by Peter Duesberg, one of the earliest and foremost experts in retrovirology; he believes, in fact, that retroviruses never can kill cells.

Even further: HIV has never been found in more than a very small percentage of the immune-system cells of HIV-infected people. What then causes *most* of the immune-system cells to disappear?

An increasing number of HIV-positive people, knowledgeable about the toxicity of the drug treatments, are declining treatment and living healthy lives (Maggiore 2000). Thus HIV does not inevitably produce AIDS even when not treated; and (point 6 above) immune-system deficiencies just like in AIDS also occur in absence of HIV.

Thus HIV and AIDS are not even inevitably correlated, let alone causally connected.

But if HIV is not the cause of AIDS, then what is?

While the so-called "dissidents" from the orthodox view are unanimous that HIV has not been shown to cause AIDS, they differ among themselves over what the cause is. Some like Root-Bernstein (1993) believe that destruction of the immune system follows a succession or variety of insults to it, with HIV being only one among several culprits, possibly the last straw in some cases. Others like Duesberg (1996) believe that HIV is a harmless "passenger" virus that happens to thrive after immune systems have already been damaged; he believes that the chief destruction of the immune system comes from heavy use of drugs. A small group of physicians and scientists in Perth, Australia, claims that the very existence of HIV has yet to be demonstrated.

There is strong evidence that Kaposi's sarcoma is caused by drug use, specifically the inhalation of "poppers", organic nitrites that dilate blood vessels and relax muscles. In 1984, the majority of gay men reported using poppers, but by 1991 only a quarter did so; the proportion of AIDS cases with Kaposi's sarcoma fell almost in unison, from 50% in 1981 to only 10% in 1991 (Duesberg 1996: 270ff.)

But if AIDS is not infectious, why did it first appear in close-knit communities? And how can it then be transmitted through blood transfusions?

Recall that infectiousness was not the first discovered characteristic of AIDS. It was at first called GRID – Gay Related Immune Deficiency; that was changed to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome essentially for reasons of political correctness, to avoid stigmatizing gay people. But neither term implies an infectious cause. Human communities share not only physical contact but also lifestyle. There are several striking precedents for apparently infectious – physically contagious – epidemics that were *not* owing to bacterial or viral transmission. Well known examples include vitamin deficiencies resulting from inadequate diets, for instance scurvy on board ships. Less well known cases include the SMON epidemic, largely played out in Japan, which resulted from heavy prescription of a certain drug by certain physicians. As to AIDS, the media have never emphasized that this epidemic which supposedly swept the communities of gay men has actually affected *only a small percentage of gay men*: some hundreds of thousands at most (out of at least several million) and chiefly in the large cities. In these communities "fast-lane" gay life was lived: staggering numbers of promiscuous encounters in conjunction with heavy and varied drug use. These are not allegations made by homophobes, it should be emphasized; quite the contrary. Larry Kramer, a leading gay activist, had described the fast-lane scene most graphically in a novel (Kramer 1978) just before the epidemic exploded. Another leading gay activist, John Lauritsen (1993), claims never to have met a gay sufferer from AIDS who denied heavy use of drugs.

Concerning blood transfusions, very detailed technical arguments have been published by Duesberg and others. For example, until very recently hemophiliacs suffered damage to their immune systems from the very blood products they received to provide clotting ability. Further, that a virus could be transmitted through these products is unlikely in the extreme since the method of preparation includes heating that should kill any virus. Non-hemophiliacs who receive transfusions are, by that very fact, suffering from some serious illness and therefore likely to have already weakened immune systems.

But has not the development of new drugs, which prolong life in HIV-positive people, proved that HIV is the cause of AIDS?

No. In the first place, these treatments could not have decreased infection rates because the incidence of AIDS (in the United States) had begun to drop already in the early 1990s, before the hyped "cocktails" and HAART (Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Therapy) had come into widespread use.

In the second place, the drugs that supposedly kill HIV and protect against AIDS *actually produce AIDS-like effects* (Brink 1998; Lauritsen 1990). A diagnosis of HIV infection followed by the conventional treatment will produce AIDS if the "therapy" is continued long enough. That is one reason why conventional treatment now increasingly incorporates "holidays" from drugs – whereas initially it had been claimed that any failure to take the drugs faithfully every day would cause the virus to rebound catastrophically.

To repeat what I quoted from Mullis: there are no scientific publications proving that HIV causes AIDS. As I've now illustrated, many facts seem inexplicable if HIV is thought to cause AIDS. But as I also said at the outset, in a single article one cannot make a convincing case on so complicated an issue; all I hope to have done is arouse interest in the possibility that the conventional wisdom about HIV-AIDS is wrong. Full arguments including technicalities are given by Duesberg (1996) and Root-Bernstein (1993). For the general reader, I recommend two short, very readable books, by:

Christine Maggiore, a young woman who was diagnosed HIV-positive. She was thereby stimulated to learn what that meant. She has since avoided anti-HIV therapy, married, and had a healthy child.

Joan Shenton, a British journalist whose investigation of the AIDS epidemic forced her to the conclusion that HIV is not its cause.

The best source of information is probably the Web-site of the Group for Reappraisal of the HIV-AIDS Hypothesis, www.virusmyth.com/aids. There are at least 50 other Web-sites taking the dissident viewpoint, and a couple of dozen defending the orthodox viewpoint. Continuing coverage of media reports about AIDS, with occasional brief annotations from a dissident viewpoint, is provided by the news-group rethinkaids@uclink4.berkeley.edu (to subscribe to it, send "subscribe rethinkaids" to majordomo@listlink.berkeley.edu).

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Bad Forecast – The Global Warming Myth

By Will Hart

An article from the April 28, 1975 issue of *Newsweek* titled "The Cooling World" makes for fascinating reading. It becomes very clear that the great weather debate has been with us for some time. But we seem to forget how quickly the issues and forecasts get completely turned around. In the mid 1970s scientists were worried about a cooling trend, "In England, farmers have seen their growing season decline by about two weeks since 1950..."

This brings up an intriguing point that most of today's journalists reporting on global warming seem to have missed. The so-called "global warming" that is being alleged to have occurred over the past century is a myth. The warming trend occurred between 1900 and 1940 that was then replaced by colder weather. The article reported that a survey completed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), "reveals a drop of half a degree in average ground temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere between 1945 and 1968."

The article went on to mention the "little ice age" that took place from the 16th to the middle of the 19th centuries and the stark fact, "just what causes the onset of major and minor ice ages remains a mystery." The last 1000 years underscores just how complex the alternating weather cycles really are. In 987 A.D, Erik the Red sailed to Greenland with a band of Vikings to escape punishment for the crime of manslaughter. It was not known to be a hospitable climate, the ice sheet was usually very thick. But the Vikings got lucky: things had changed during a global warm spell and Erik established two farming settlements where the ice had formerly been.

That time is known as the Medieval Warm Period. It lasted about four hundred years and raised average temperatures from 2 to 3 degrees above today's levels. Sea ice off the coast of Iceland nearly vanished. Eskimos settled in the normally frigid Ellesmere Island off the Northwest coast of Greenland. In the Rocky Mountains the snow level was pushed 1,000 feet above where it is today.

But this warm spell ended and a cycle of frigid weather replaced it. The "little ice age" set its icy grip on the world in the 15th and 16th centuries. Historical records in Great Britain and China complain of vintners having to relocate their vineyards 300 miles south of where they had been and orange groves that had suddenly been killed by hard frosts. By 1700 Iceland was surrounded by sea ice again. The "little ice age" lasted until the middle of the 19th century.

It seems that we should perhaps be thankful that we got a brief 100-year respite from

the deep freeze instead of bemoaning "global warming" as if it portended the end of the world. What about this global warming forecast? It all began in the 1980s when a couple of scientists put the warming trend that occurred the first half of the century together with a 40-year buildup of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and came up with the famous "greenhouse effect."

The rising C02 levels—it was theorized—would continue to increase, raising global temperatures, which would melt the polar caps, push the sea levels up and inundate coastal cities. This weather-Armageddon scenario made for a great sound-byte. It was the type of story that Hollywood could turn into a "based on real facts" made for TV movie. The hypothesis soon turned into established science, at least according to its promoters, and it became the daily bread of the mass media throughout the 1990s (and still is).

Critics were simply ignored. Then a funny thing happened in the fall of 2001. NASA released the results of their study of carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere for the last decade of the 20th century. The global warming camp was shocked into silence. There was no C02 buildup! It had been promised since the mid-1980s. However, the Earth's land-based ecosystems absorbed all the naturally produced carbon dioxide plus 1.4 billion tons that humanity produced. The media published this report but never made mention of it being the cornerstone prediction of the "global warming" theory. Interesting.

By this time several international conferences had been convened and policies were agreed upon primarily aimed at dealing with the "greenhouse effect" and "global warming," which were nothing more than scientific speculation run amok. This would soon be confirmed by several more reports released in 2001 and early 2002.

The November issue of *Science* contained this head-scratching piece of news for global warmers: "We noted in the last issue that Antarctic sea ice has been thickening substantially for the past two years. Now we notice a scientific study published last spring that indicates this is a longer-term phenomenon. A study published in the April 15 issue of *Geophysical Research Letters* finds that sea ice in Antarctica has been increasing rather than decreasing from October 1987 to September 1999..."

A paper titled "Antarctic Climate Cooling and Terrestrial Ecosystem Response" recently appeared on *Nature's* web site:

"Climate models generally predict amplified warming in polar regions... Although previous reports suggest slight recent continental warming, our spatial analysis of Antarctic meteorological data demonstrates a net cooling on the Antarctic continent between 1966 and 2000..."

The scientists who are shouting the loudest about warming trends at the South Pole, who seem to have the media's ear, are studying a strip of land on the Antarctic Peninsula, not the western ice sheet or the interior valleys. On January 14, 2002 the *Washington Post* reported, "...scientists have found that temperatures on the Antarctic continent have fallen steadily for more than two decades." Other major U.S. papers failed to pick up this story.

Would we be too forthright to ask why? Could it have anything to do with the fact that the major media has been reporting that there is a worldwide consensus among scientists that "global warming" is a done deal? We will find more compelling evidence to the contrary, but do not expect to see it covered with same "white heat" that global warming has been for two decades.

Since 1980, there has been an advance of more than 55% of the 625 mountain glaciers under observation by the World Glacier Monitoring group in Zurich Switzerland. The Nisqually glacier on Mount Rainer is the most well documented glacier in the U.S. Records, kept since the mid-1800s, show that it has been advancing since 1931. Weather stations in the Alps and Nordic countries show a 1 degree C decline since 1930.

Geologists exploring Rocky Mountain National Park discovered 100 new glaciers last summer. "The results dramatically changed the map of one of the nation's oldest and best-known parks...Previously, officials believed the park 60 miles NW of Denver, included 20 permanent ice and snow features, including 6 named glaciers." (AP, 2001) In Patagonia, the Mount Moreno glacier is expanding. These reports may come as a surprise because all we seem to hear about are the glaciers and ice features that are melting.

What about this consensus among scientists? A 1992 Gallup survey of climatologists found that 81 percent believed that the global temperature had not risen over the past 100 years, were uncertain whether or why such warming had occurred, or believed any temperatures increases during that period were within the natural range of variation. What consensus has the media been referring to we might ask?

According to Accu-Weather the world's leading commercial forecaster, " Global air temperatures as measured by land-based weather stations show an increase of about 0.45 degrees Celsius over the past century. This may be no more than normal climatic variation...[and] several biases in the data may be responsible for some of this increase."

Average global temperatures can be very misleading since many of the readings are taken around major metro areas that are known to be "heat islands." Satellite data, which is not subject to any local ground-based distortion, indicate a slight cooling over the past 18 years.

The Polar Regions and the tops of high mountains around the world are the precursors to a coming cooling period as Lawrence Hetcht noted in an article titled "Is a New Ice Age Underway?" in an issue of *21st Science and Technology Magazine*: "The significance of the fact, immediately grasped by any competent climatologist, is that glacial advance is an early warning of Northern Hemisphere chilling of the sort that can bring on an Ice Age."

Now let us interject and interpose the data and the historical context that the "global warmers" leave out of their scenario: We are about 10,500 years into an interglacial warming period. It has been punctuated by several "mini ice ages" but on the whole the Earth has been warming and the ice sheets thinning and the glaciers melting since the end of the last Great Ice Age. The long-term climate models clearly show oscillations between alternating ice ages and interglacials. The current warm trend has already lasted longer than previous ones.

Can we say with any certainty that the "mini ice age" that started in the 15th century was not the beginning of the next Big Ice Age? It only ended in 1850 when the industrial revolution was underway adding C02 to the atmosphere. In his article Hecht notes that, "Our current understanding of the long-term weather cycles shows that for the past 800,000 years, periods of approximately 100,000 years duration, called Ice Ages, have been interrupted by periods of approximately 10,000 years, known as interglacials. (We are now 10,500 years into an interglacial.)"

Admittedly, this is a complex set of cycles with many variables, however the graphs of ice core studies show a fairly predictable pattern geared, not to C02 levels, but to the Earth's tilt, precession and the fluctuations of solar radiation reaching the Earth. The 100,000- year Ice Age is a convergence of 41,000 year and 26,000 cycles. They are complex but not chaotic. These patterns are very precise and have been rigorously studied and established.

We have to keep three concepts in mind: cycles, trends and momentum. We are in the latter stages of an interglacial according to the long-term climate models. About 18,000 years ago the last Ice Age was at its peak. Vast ice sheets covered the Northern Hemisphere. Sea levels were about 300-feet lower than today. An Ice Age gains momentum and feeds on itself as the *albedo effect* reflects incoming solar radiation back to space, the oceans also cool and the Polar seas freeze and the summers get colder and colder.

The opposite happens in an interglacial. The ice sheets disappear, the land holds in more heat and the ocean warms, melting glaciers and raising sea levels. Now 10 millennia into that process all that we see are the warming cycle, the trends and momentum of the interglacial epoch. But isn't this how a cyclical phenomena with a trend operates? Every waveform has a peak and a trough. Just as the trend seems to be manifesting some stability it dissolves and reverses polarity. And it is just like people to start believing the trend is permanent just before the reversal.

That is exactly how the Stock Market operates and why most investors lose their shirts. Global warmers have tried to make a case that the Greenland ice sheet has been melting, but the results of the research show inconsistencies between the western and eastern ice sheets: one is expanding, the other contracting. Greenland was actually another land mass that bucked the alleged "global warming" trends by "ending the century slightly cooler than it began," according to Phillip Huybrechts, a climate researcher from the University of Brussels.

Dr. David Deming of the University of Oklahoma points out that Earth's average temperature was higher than at present for 7,500 of the past 10,000 years. The only "global warming" we are experiencing is in relation to the last "little ice age" we have been coming out of. So what then, we may wonder, is the danger of a little rise in the global temperature, if it were indeed happening?

But that is a moot point because there is no solid evidence to support the theory and the failure of the C02 prediction based on the greenhouse model is the first solid evidence *against* the scenario. This is troubling because it points up a fact that many people are becoming aware of: science and the mass media have been operating in a very unscientific way by making ludicrous proclamations and statements that sound more like the Psychic Hotline than what we should expect from our key scientific and journalistic institutions. What happened to the rules of objectivity and evidence?

This is bad forecast in more ways than one...

THE FIRE THEORY

Ian Kidd

Scientific discoveries exist in two forms. The first is *revolutionary*: by the discovery of new phenomena, which can then be scientifically analysed. The second is *revolutionary,* the application of known scientific laws to existing phenomena to determine new understanding. As an example of the first case, the discovery of a new dinosaur fossil could open up a whole new understanding of evolution. As an example of the second case, applying the laws of gravity to existing particles can yield new understanding. Most scientific discoveries are evolutionary: they develop one initial point. An example could be the DNA double helix discovery, leading to genetics, genetic engineering, transgenics, gene mapping, animal and then human cloning, et cetera. Revolutionary discoveries have included flight, the atomic theory, computers and robotics. Whole new branches of study have arisen from these initial ideas.

While I am not a scientist, I have a scientific education, and am passionate about science. I can apply my understanding to the world as well as any professor. In doing so, I have formulated a new theory of life based solely on my application of existing scientific laws to an unsuspected form of life.

Zoroastrians worship Spenta Mainyu, the spirit of life and truth, in the form of fire. Zoroaster himself would tend fires, amongst his occupations. Fire is a powerful and active force in nature. Since man first tamed it to warm himself, to cook his food, and to ward off wild beasts, fire has been revered; and, by some, worshipped. Fire is the great destroyer. Fire can eradicate cities, crops, disease, and bodies. Fire is now, as it has always been, a weapon. From the torching of cities to the fires of napalm, fire is a potent symbol of power.

Fire is also a somewhat aloof natural force. There is nothing else like fire. Electricity comes close, but fire is independent in nature. Electricity and magnetism are interlinked. The physical world of stone and rock are linked, as air and water are. Gravity and the repulsive force believed by physicists are interlinked. But what is there like fire? Nothing. Fire is unique.

I have a notion of fire as a living thing. I have come to this notion scientifically. I applied a law of science to readily observable phenomena. The law is a cornerstone of biology, and the unsuspected form of life: fire.

It is a fact of biology that there are seven observable characteristics of all living creatures, be they plant or animal. These are the MRS-GREN characteristics:

1. **M**ovement
2. **R**espiration
3. **S**ensitivity to environment
4. **G**rowth
5. **R**eproduction
6. **E**xcretion
7. **N**utrition

These seven MRSGREN characteristics are found in all living things, plant and animal. Lower organisms such as viruses are less obviously living things, according to this definition. Viruses do not grow, respire, excrete, consume food or sense their environment. A virus is simply a piece of DNA in a protein coat. If a virus is a form of living thing, it is very primitive indeed. Also, crystals can grow, but are not alive. We could also perceive natural chemical reactions as nutrition and excretion, such as the reactions between the atmosphere and land. It would make sense, however, for a transience between material things and stages of MRSGREN adherence. It makes more sense for substances to obey one, then two, maybe three MRSGREN characteristics, moving upwards to obeying all, then for there simply to be *no* MRSGREN adherents, and then lots. However, to be considered a *living thing,* a thing must adhere to *all* of the MRSGREN characteristics. Crystals *grow.* Viruses *move* and *reproduce.* Other forms of life do all seven. There is an ascendancy in things, from the non-living to the living. But critically, a thing which obeys all seven MRSGREN characteristics is considered as a *living thing*.

All living things move, to find shelter, escape from predators, to find a mate, and to find food. Animals crawl, run, fly, hop, swim or leap. Plants can move themselves to achieve the most beneficial position to catch the suns rays.

All living things engage in gas exchange. Animal's intake oxygen to burn in respiration to generate chemical energy, and release carbon dioxide. Plants take in carbon dioxide for use in photosynthesis, and release oxygen.

All living things show reaction to their environment. Often, this reaction is obvious and self-evident. A predator will stalk its prey over long distances. Reptiles will move into the sun when their body temperature falls. Plants slowly move to catch the Sun's life-giving rays. Even in the lower forms of life, sensitivity to the environment is shown, either immediately, or genetically.

All plants and animals also evidently grow. From seeds and saplings to great sequoias. From cubs and pups to full-grown tigers and hounds. From tadpoles to frogs, and from a tender shoot of grass to a knee-high reed. All things increase the size and complexity of their physical form to improve survival chances.

All plants and animals also reproduce. Sexual reproduction can be found in forms of life from birds and bees to plants. Reproduction may be vigorous and constant in vulnerable prey species, or slow and intermittent, as in some rare flowers. Asexual reproduction can be found in lower forms of life such as amoeba, which simply divide in half. However, more complex forms of life lack this perhaps enviable simplicity. Living things reproduce to continue their existence, and to promote their own survival by replacing weaker members.

Excretion is the release of poisonous or unnecessary waste materials from the organism's internal processes. This is most evident with the removal of solid and liquid waste from an animal's digestive system. Indigestible fibres, minerals, chemicals and substances are processed, such as by the kidneys, and expelled from the body. Build-up of these waste products would be harmful to the organisms. Expulsion of waste gases from respiratory systems, such as that of oxygen and carbon dioxide, is also an example of excretion.

Nutrition, the need for intake of matter to support the other six characteristics, is also evident in all living things. Be it grass, meat, plankton or other, all living things intake nutrients. Plants draw in minerals, water and carbon dioxide for photosynthesis to convert into glucose. Herbivores graze and intake grass, roots, shoots and green plants, while carnivores eat the meat of other animals. Omnivores such as humans have a choice. All living creatures display these seven characteristics.

So we have seven definable characteristics of living things that are accepted and preached by science. Even a quick thought experiment. Let us take MRSGREN and apply it to a human. We walk to work, run in sport, and jump in elation. We breathe every two seconds, exhaling carbon dioxide. We respond to our environment, jerking away at pain, finding satisfaction in warmth and displaying pleasure at good sensations. We grow, from six pound seven ounce babies to six-foot athletes. We reproduce to make our own six pound seven ounce babies. We excrete, going to the toilet, especially after a big meal. And that big meal itself, the food, the drink, is our intake of nutrients.

So we have a scientific law, that all things that observe the MRSGREN characteristics are living things. So I now move to my theory.

I have an idea that fire is a living thing, according to the MRSGREN system. If the things that observe MRSGREN are living, then fire is a living thing. It is true that fire is not often thought to be alive. Often, the closest fire gets to recognition, as a living things is in the poeticisms of firemen, who express awe and respect at the infernos that engulf warehouses and factories, how the fire seems to chase and pursue them. But firemen, like most people, do not think fire to be a living thing.

But let us apply the scientific MRSGREN system to fire, and see what we shall see.

Firstly, the characteristic of movement. Fire moves when it is active. Like many animals, when fire has a plentiful supply of nutrient fuel, it is highly active. Animals that live in low-energy ecosystems, such as deep-sea fish, move little, and are very inactive. Whereas animals that live in high-energy ecosystems, like jungle ecologies, are very active. Fire obeys these ecological laws. When fire has a limited supply of nutrient, such as a single candle, fire cannot move. Bt when fire is presented with the feast of a forest, fire moves to consume its food supply. All animals do this. Place a wolf in a field of sheep and the wolf will move from sheep to sheep. Sharks swim to shoals of fish. Owls swoop on rodents. Fire moves in parallel to its nutrient supply, burning up trees, along rope and down candles. In this respect, fire is midway between animal and plant. Plants cannot move much, as they are rooted to the ground, or to a rock. Animals, on the other hand, are rooted to nothing, and are free to move to move as they wish. Fire can move as it wishes, but only along the line of its nutrient supply. Fire is a high-energy life form, and will die once deprived of it. This could perhaps explain the ravenousness of fire; a desperate, hungry creature is a dangerous one.

Respiration, the most evident of fire as a living things. In terms of respiration, fire is an animal. Like animals, fire must intake oxygen to burn in its metabolic processes. Fire cannot survive if deprived of oxygen; it will suffocate. Like animals, fire cannot survive in a vacuum. Plants, again like animals, release as their waste gas carbon dioxide. And like animals, the carbon dioxide waste gas of fire will suffocate fire if the build-up becomes too much. Fire respires, burning oxygen, to generate thermal energy, in the same way that animals respire, burning oxygen, to generate chemical energy, and a little thermal energy.

Sensitivity is a more difficult point. On the basis of sensitivity to environment, fire is a very unsophisticated and simple life form. But this does not exclude it from life. Many living things express only the sensitivity they need to survive. Plants respond to move to face the Sun, to photosynthesize and to respond to predator incursion, such as by releasing harmful chemicals such as tannin. Bacteria respond very little also. Fire responds very little to its environment. Fire shows awareness of its environment, either directly or not, by moving to follow the path of its fuel source.

As animals move to track food sources, and as plants move to face the sun, and as man moves to consume resources, so fire moves to consume its food source. Thus fire displays very little sensitivity. But then, fire does not need to. Also, it may be argued that fire, lacking a brain, neural clusters or nervous system, cannot be alive. But plants have no known nervous system, or brain. Plant and animal cells have cellular nuclei, but no central nervous system. Animals have cellular nuclei and nervous systems, and are more complex than plants. Plants have cellular nuclei, and are more complex than fire. Fire has no cellular nuclei, and has as its mode of sensitivity only the limits of the physical processes, which sustain it.

Fire has no need of a brain, nuclei, or nervous system, as the physical forces which sustain fire can do all that fire would need a nervous system to do: respond to food source. All other MRSGREN factors of fire can be accommodated with the purely physical processes of fire. Fire moves according to physical laws governing the release of heat energy. Fire burns in the presence of oxygen, and is snuffed by the tasteless stagnancy of carbon dioxide. Fire grows by converting physical matter into thermal energy. Reproduction will be covered below. Excretion is also due to the physical processes: fire converts oxygen into heat, and in doing so creates carbon dioxide waste, and fire needs a combustible fuel source to sustain its physical processes. Fire is an energy-based life form, as opposed to a matter-based life form. Fire has no means to support a physical biology, and thus instead relies solely on the physical processes of combustion to support itself.

Growth is apparent in all living things. As plants and animals intake nutrients, they use these nutrients to expand their size to the greatest possible extent. A baby flame can intake the nutrients of a forest and grow to a raging inferno. Again, obeying biological and ecological laws, fire expands to consume all food sources to attain greatest population size. Fire will consume all nutrients until it can no more.

Reproduction is also apparent in all plant and animal forms. Animals engage in sexual intercourse to exchange genetic materials, which will be passed on to offspring. Plants release pollens, which mingle with those of other plants. Seeds are released which sprout and bear fruit. But these require some physical basis, be it sexual organs, transmissible genetic material, or seeds, et cetera. Fire lacks the physicality for these things. Thus, again, fire finds parallel with the lowest forms of life. When a single-celled amoeba attains a size large enough, it simply splits in two. This results in two independent organisms. This asexual reproduction requires nothing more than a suitable physical size of the initial organism. Thus fire can reproduce; only the reproduction of fire is tied in close with its growth. A fire organism can be vast, existing simultaneously in a huge tree; but if a branch were to fall, and cut off the fire on the branch from the main fire on the tree, the branch fire would survive. The fire on the branch can exist independently; it just splits in two. As the size of a fire organism has no fixed physical limit, unlike matter-based life forms, fire has no need for developed reproductive systems. And with no centralized nervous, digestive, respiratory or material distribution systems, and no physical boundaries such as cell walls or membranes or organs and organelles, fire has no concern with planned reproduction. Even plant cells can only reproduce when the cell has duplicated all of its internal structures. Fire has no need to do this; it needs only to split in two.

Excretion, again, highly evident in fire. Fire leaves behind ash, which is the indigestible material that fire cannot convert into energy. This is the material that fire excretes as physical waste. Fire also releases waste gases of carbon dioxide, and also other fumes containing unusable gases. Like all digesting living things, fire leaves behind what is cannot synthesize.

This ties in with the nutritional needs of fire. Most organisms have a limited range of things they can digest. Be it flesh only, or grass only. Fire can digest in its metabolic processes only combustible materials, such as paper, fabrics, wood, et cetera. Like living things, fire, deprived of a food supply, will die. Fire requires nutrition in order to sustain its physical processes.

Thus we have an examination of the validity of fire as a living thing according to the scientific principle of MRSGREN. We have examined the seven characteristics, or criteria, of MRSGREN in relation to fire, and have illustrated their worth. It is my conclusion that fire does represent, uniquely, an energy-based life form.

This is a revolutionary idea. For the last seven thousand years of recorded history, all the living things identified by science have been matter-based. From microbes, sponges and plankton, to fish, birds and mammals; all living things hitherto identified have been matter-based. But fire is non-living. Although fire fulfils the scientific criteria to be considered a *living thing* it is radically different. Fire has no set physical form, its form being determined solely by physical laws of heat transference. Fire has no physiology of any description, no nervous, sensory, digestive, motile or circulatory systems. Fire has no basis of genetic reproduction, no form of transmitted design. Fire lacks any physical component except its fuel source. In this respect, fire lives a very impermanent existence indeed: it exists only long as its fuel exists. Deprive a living thing of food and it will only slowly decay, and die. But deprive fire of its fuel, and it immediately decays and dies.

We must see also the uniqueness of the creation of fire, as a life form. All matter-based life requires a prerequisite thing: a parent organism, be it an impregnated mother, or a plant to release a seed. But a simple bolt of lightning, or striking a match, can create fire. Such a simple genesis can be seen only as remarkable. Most organisms are considered durable based on their durability and responsiveness to changes in their environment; but fire must be considered durable if it can be created by nothing more than a spark. Fire has no need for complex courtship and mating rituals; it is wholly asexual, with no notion of gender whatsoever; gender being a physical development of evolution. Fire supersedes even the simplicity of the reproduction of amoeba; while amoeba must increase in size before beginning a lengthy division, fire simply expands to form a super-organism. In this sense, fire does not reproduce; it simply keeps growing.

There are evolutionary considerations, too. Fire cannot evolve, as it lacks transmissible genetic material. Only physical life forms that consist of improvable designs can evolve. Fire has no physical components but its fuel source, and thus has no need to evolve. What considerations and impacts are there for a life form that has no need of evolution? So long as we have combustible materials, fire will remain, if I may, the top of the food chain. What are teeth, claws, speed, stealth or camouflage, to a predator that cannot be easily killed, that moves fast, has no exploitable vulnerability and which cannot be hunted?

Interesting to note that when there is a forest fire, all animals, from the stag to the puma, all flee alongside. Animals sense and recognize the presence of a superior predator. In this evolutionary state of mind, we must see also the glaring development of fire as a predator. Evolution exists for living things to exploit the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of other living things, in order to further their own survival. If you cannot match the speed of your predator, then you evolve camouflage to conceal yourself. If your predator is hunted by something with red spots, then you evolve red spots. Now consider that all things in the natural world are composed in some part of carbon. Fire can burn carbon. Indeed, to support its metabolic process of releasing carbon dioxide waste gas, fire *needs* carbon. And if the entire natural world, all the living things, is composed of carbon, then fire has the monopoly. Unlike any other animal, fire can hunt and consume every single living creature on the planet, from bacteria, to plant, to animal. What other animal can do this?

We can also solve for fire, an energy-based life form, the problem of the origin of life. For matter-based life, the origin of life is a baffling problem. The chicken and the egg is the best example. What came first? Chicken? Egg? How did the first living thing come about? Chance reaction of chemicals in a pond of prospective life? Lightning sparking life? These are questions merging biology and chemistry, with adjacent philosophical concerns. But for fire, the question of origin is simple: the natural world is rife with potential to create fire. Lava flows, lightning bolts and dry seasons and the sun; all can create life -- poof! Just like that. Fire is a most superior life form. It can be created instantly and easily, it can grow and reproduce with rapidity unparalleled by any matter-based life, and has no physical concerns save the presence of its plentiful nutrients.

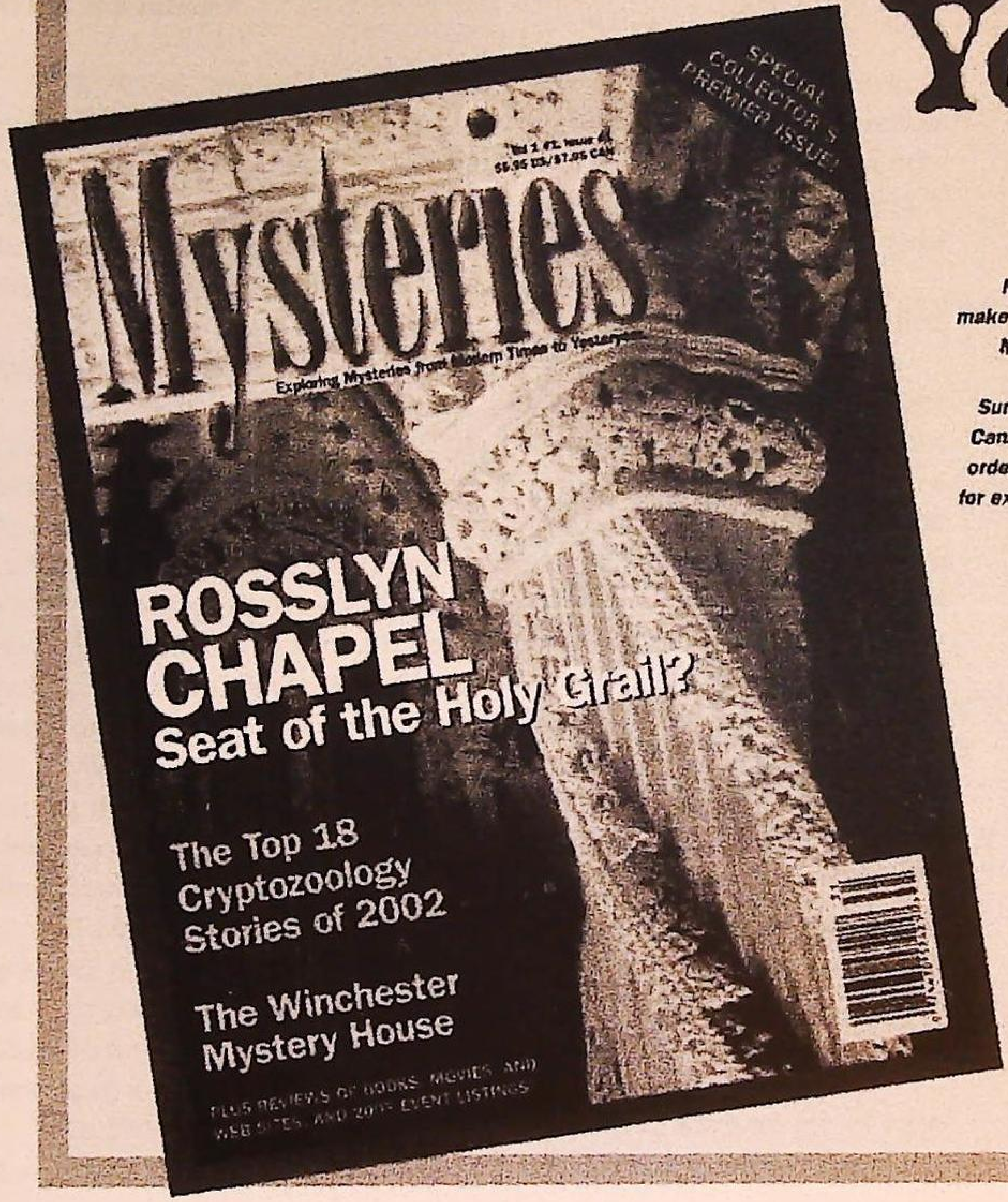
Thus we have an energy-based life form. Highly volatile, with no natural predators, and being capable of being brought into existence through abundant natural processes. Life without biology. An organism without a physiology. A metabolism without biochemistry. A life form rooted not in biology, but in simple physicality.

As a final consideration, it is generally accepted that life on other worlds would be based on our understood biological conditions, the need for water and certain organic chemicals such as methane and carbon dioxide. We have thought life on other worlds to be biological in nature. But lightning exists on the other plants, and all that would be needed is some carbon-based material, and some oxygen, and you would have life. Energy-based life. An irony that we thought life existed with a need for water; with fire, you could not be more wrong. We think of aliens and think of six legs, four eyes and green blood. But fire would constitute the most fantastic organism in existence: a being that can be spontaneously created, on worlds devoid of biology, with only the prerequisites of a spark, some oxygen, and something to burn.

NOTES

FIRE= group consciousness → one string not hold a ship to dock, but a thousand strings in a rope…etc. → one flame, no brain…a million flames, collective brain → forest fires intelligent? → sun is vast fireball → not combustion, but nuclear fire → stars conscious, in a way? → nuclear fires conscious?

It's Time to Question Your Beliefs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MEMETICS

By Jack Hardy

What is a meme?

The word "meme" was first popularly used by Richard Dawkins in his book, *The Selfish Gene*. It has come to mean a cultural accretion of knowledge, a package of several ideas that can be passed onto others. It's usually more complex than a single idea, and can represent a fashion/music/lifestyle or a belief. It is the mental equivalent of a gene whereby a package of many attributes is passed on.

The science or study of memes in action has come to be called memetics.

A meme has been regarded too narrowly I believe, and I am interested in broadening the ideas of what a meme is or can do. No matter how narrow a definition you give to a meme, sooner or later you have to consider more nebulous or abstract ideas as having acquired enough cultural accretion to have become memes. It's easy to conceive of a visual fad such as the hula-hoop as having a chartable spread through society and calling it a meme, but surely socialism, futurism or a new political idea are also memes that spread through society and are all the more interesting despite being invisible.

Memes like these, just as in any fad or fashion have a zenith before arcing into decline. There will always be a few adherents of any "ism" who may be the actual carriers of the meme, but eventually they may find themselves beached upon a shore that has no tides.

Someone new to the idea of memes might say well why don't we just call them ideas? The answer is that memes act as if they have a life of their own. Whether they do or not is not the relevant point but that they do replicate and have a dynamism that is absent from our common notion of a simple idea.

As I've thought about memes, they seem to have an arc of existence that defies simple replicative models. Indeed, I daresay that many memes lie dormant awaiting a resurgence, as might forgotten gods that can then spread like a wildfire. Let's say a meme like Nazism could be re-established and that's why volunteers are so keen to quash it.

On this model, some memes could be likened to a huge bull waiting to be let out the gate and into a china shop.

I suspect that memes act as living entities with strategies for survival and aren't therefore so simple as replicators. Maybe my definition of a meme is different to an accepted one and we will have to call my memes a jeme. As I use the word meme, I mean it to be an accretion of mental energy that acts as if it has a life of its own. This mental energy can be spread through many minds or maybe it resides someplace as yet unidentified. Whether or not this is strictly true is less important to me than the fact that this definition allows for insights and explanations previously unavailable.

Academics seem overly cautious in stepping outside of a narrow definition of what a meme is or does. I've had several discussions and some email correspondence with published authors on memes, and they mostly prefer to stay in the corral of memes they can see or point at.

I claim that so-called simple memes have embedded suppositions. Simply calling a craze or an identifiable fad a meme above other contenders is safe but useless. A linguist could explicate that any language we use to discuss something has all manner of implicit premises. The reason that we don't elaborate on them is a matter of pragmatism over philosophy. A philosopher might contend that hidden in any narrow definition are unstated assumptions that have a wider context. Anything that impinges upon our consciousness requires that only a holistic approach can be appropriate.

Simple memes may be easier to map than the nebulous meme-complexes, but as no meme has laboratory isolation, it is intellectually dishonest to suggest the purity of one over another.

Once you allow a meme to escape its unimaginative straightjacket that has kept meme theory bound for the last twenty-five years, you can accept that new explanations become possible. In human affairs, in parapsychology as well as in ordinary life, we finally have the tools to crack the nut; to explain that which was once considered unexplainable.

Memes as I use them are for the most part something that seems independent of self, and shared by several minds. However we all have a sense of self, an ego or superego that we create as we grow and could be considered our individual meme.

Rupert Sheldrake is another memetic theorist. He has postulated life forms as morphic units that create morphic fields. These fields then allow memes to operate within them.

Now my main difference with this model is that the morphogenetic hypothesis focuses too much on memory and animals somehow generating their own operational destiny. It doesn't really explain how memes can operate independently of us or how a zeitgeist (a spirit of the age) can meld human behaviour to it.

I see memes as acting as if they have a life of their own. Maybe they do and maybe they aren't truly independent but they act as if they are. For Dawkins, this is why actions that seem altruistic are essentially selfish. He used memes as a way to explain how genes could perpetuate themselves by seemingly acting in ways that may appear not to maximize their survivability.

By treating memes as being akin to a genetic packet involves them having an arc of existence like a life form or morphic unit as Rupert may have it. So it is that memes can grow and die. No-one else really goes into this I think.

Another aspect of my memetic theory is that a meme innoculates itself with a little bit of its opposite. So it is that good can come out of evil and murder can erupt in paradise. This is outlined a bit more in the section on longevity.

My whole dynamic sets up notions that aren't fully explored or even considered by most would be memeticians, and this is the main difference between me and just about everyone else. Unfortunately, most academic writers on memes want to restrict the definition of them to something easily visible and are unaware of philosophical premises and assumptions that consign such simple renderings as a mask.

Sheldrake in particular is certainly on the right track and the experiments of pattern recognition after mass exposure and the illustration of pet and owner morphic resonances are classic studies.

Now there are many academics that aren't that keen on the idea of morphic fields or the idea of memes in general. It's a problem for them because they can't see it. I'd like to point out that they can't see the money in their bank accounts either, just some numbers representing it, but that is apparently not so insurmountable.

Academics aside, memes are a tool for understanding. Just like numbers, we can't point to a number or a meme, but can find the abstract has a vital form that we use to get a grip on reality.

Many thinkers have a problem with the idea of a group mind, too, which is understandable, or that memes can be anthropomorphized as having characteristics to enable their survival. Well, one approach to deflect this criticism is to say that they don't have to actually be like this, just that they *behave* as if they do. Same as flocking birds might not actually have a group mind but they act as if they do.

Personalizing genes and saying they adopt selfish strategies to ensure their survival is another problem area, but if they even act as a life form regardless of whether they really are, then why not treat them as such? We don't say a number is completely independent of another number but within its sphere of operation, it acts as if it is.

Now there are experiments that do seem to indicate the existence of group minds. I'll mention the 100th monkey effect in the section on devolving memes, and here just mention Restak's experiments with bees. His work can be found in *Mind*, number 249, and has also been featured in Howard Bloom's *The Lucifer Principle* (p. 140). Basically, Restak showed that bees can anticipate future sources of food despite quite complex mathematical computations. What he did was position food at increasing distances away from the first site according to a mathematical formula. As the bees all went to the area they next expected food to be at, who was doing the calculation?

For my own work on memes I take them to be a product of many thoughts, a cultural accretion of meaning. They can be a belief, a unique viewpoint. I realize this is very amorphous, but a thought may contain a meme or even a single word. They are complex and it would be foolish to try and restrict their meaning to something apparently simple. Even a word has a host of unstated premises and connotations, and words operate within a culture in an accepted way but also in a flux of meaning that can suddenly change.

It is logically impossible to fix a meaning for a meme. As long as we can agree on the basics of what memes can do and are not within broad parameters, we can enquire into them. Trying to skewer their meaning using words is only going to allow it to ever wriggle off the board. Let me give another example of a word that we can understand yet can never pin down as to exactly what it can mean in real terms. Consider the word "omnipotent." Though we can understand the general meaning, we would have logical problems in defining its actual scope. Does being omnipotent mean you could create a creature that can never be destroyed, or run a mile faster than can ever be achieved again? Whichever answer one gives is going to negate the general meaning of being omnipotent.

So basically a meme is a concept. It can be shared or held alone. These memes can have favoured attachments just like molecules. Certain pairings can be more probable than others. So memes are not just an explanation for the workings of human affairs, but a way for things to find each other. With memes, man can find God, a woman can find her mate, a customs officer can find a smuggler and a hunter his prey.

Another area where memes make themselves problematic to academia is that we can use them to explain phenomena, but it is often of a kind that is non-repeatable. I think it was Arthur Koestler who postulated the existence of the library angel. What he meant was that often he was looking for some information and he'd open a book to the very page with the information he needed. Or he found a book he could use shelved wrongly, but right where he happened to look. People are known to open the Bible at a passage that seems unusually apt to their interest. I'm sure we've all had these coincidental experiences, and I doubt that we could repeat them for the sake of a scientific study, but memes can explain them.

Building memes

So how do memes work? Well, something done consciously and unconsciously builds a meme. They aren't something you can usually point at, and to devolve them (or use them) seems to work best when it happens in an unconscious way.

Let,s take a meme building activity like a new fashion. Some pioneers wear it, soon the media acts as a platform for others to espouse it. Everyone quickly becomes aware of it, but not everyone is going to adopt it unless it fits in with the zeitgeist. Instead of a fashion that we can see, imagine this applying to a new philosophy or a belief. The longer this meme is built, then the more it accretes levels of meaning and spreads to include lifestyles, food, clothes and stance, all of which can indicate a particular meme. For example, consider the meme of an artist, or what it would mean to be a beatnik, hippy or a rasta. A meme that started as a fashion can soon be taken to include preferred foods or political viewpoints and philosophy. The views held by a person can now be deduced, simply by looking at the hat that they wear.

Like a plate resting upon a table, where there are only a few disparate molecules in direct contact. Or a brain where an idea can lodge in one of several areas, a meme could be said to lodge in some of many possible minds. It may change minds often and doesn't have a constant localization.

Academics seem to think that the earlier fashion meme is somehow simpler than the later accretion of several attributes. They have claimed that the simple thing that got imitated is somehow a pure meme, and the later development is a meme complex. I deny this thinking as intellectual laziness, and contend that the latter is contained wholly in the former. It's just that we haven't yet had to time to see its full fruition so are duped into assuming a seed is more complex than a flower.

Just because we can't yet chart a development, or because there is controversy here, does not mean that it isn't so. The controversy lies in the consequence being contained in the premise. There are too many vested interests that need to separate these links of x leading to y, and there is a very big blame game to play if we go down the path of accepting that some minor detail will lead to major dissonance. But this is what memes do. They start as a minor detail, say a schoolkid wearing a safety pin, and become a fully blown segment of human behaviour with a generational chunk of glue sniffers. Now I use a dramatic illustration but I also feel that we can't hold back a memetic tide, nor would we endear ourselves to anyone by trying to do so. Memes are morally neutral, having both good and bad aspects that vary according to our interpretation. What can seem harmful can produce benefit and vice-versa, which is the yin and yang of them.

When I first read Dawkin's book a quarter of a century ago, I had already formed a nebulous theory of mental energy. Living in what seemed to be a vast population of like-minded people, where people all reacted the same or used the same current expressions, I envisaged a gigantic group mind. Similar to ants or bees or flocks of birds, it seemed to me that we all acted in a predictable manner that was linked to the group. I'd started to consider this a gigantic psychic generator that could surely be tapped in some way. Another thought was that there would be nodes where you could find certain phenomena like a very lucky person or someone that could do no wrong. I imagined that these nodes could be related to interference patterns and denoted either something more normal than normal, or a recipient of all this psychic flow. When I discovered the word 'meme', I realised that this was a descriptive term that I could utilise. It took a couple of years to simmer, before I knew how to use it, and about 15 years before I suddenly realised the further implications of memetics. The mechanistic model of building and devolving memes wasn't the crux of the matter though undoubtedly this would be what people first glommed onto.

Consciousness seems to be a factor in the transmission process, though not an absolute. It's just that memes seem to operate better the less aware we are of their operation.

Unaware as well as conscious effort builds a meme so that it can be said to have a growth period, and once built, is able to be devolved, by others often unconnected to the building process. This devolvement works best by unconscious effort and is a way for knowledge to become distributed in a way once thought to be science fiction. The potential of telepathy, although fantastic, can be explained in memetic terms. Similarly, memetics does enable unconnected people to have a shared knowledge or belief system. As when scattered cultures built pyramid structures, there was a memetic diffusion of similar goals. This is exemplified by the phenomenon known as the 100th monkey effect, and to which I'll come back to shortly.

Animals can share memes. As their consciousness, is taken as being more simplistic, they are able to act alike. When flocks of birds and schools of fish turn or feed or flee all at the same time, it is difficult to explain this as a totality of separate, independent decision making. Are they all plugged into a group mind or acting in an identical way just for being biologically similar? And it's not just animals that act identically. Human children can act and react in the same way. Are they similar for being closer to the mould? Are they more telepathic for being more similar?

This is the real advance of memetics. To ask these kind of questions that we may indeed discern answers to at some point down the road. By looking at memes as a potential indicator of both group and individual consciousness, we can unseal some of the mystery that has previously been a closed book to us.

This may initially seem overly philosophical, but memes can explain something like a soul better than the concept of souls themselves. For instance, if you take a worm and cut it into two pieces that then becomes two worms, did you also create another soul? A more prosaic explanation is that both worms would be sharing the selfsame meme as can identical twins, until their different reactions match their different experiences. Memes can seem an unnecessary concept until you start to realise that memes can explicate better than other undefined concepts that are freely used.

However interesting it can be to contrast souls as a memetic concept, for now let's just treat a meme as a package of cultural knowledge. It is an idea with an accretion of connotation aboard that can seem to act as if it has a life of its own.

Devolving memes

In the last section I suggested nodes as a place where memes could be better able to be devolved. Now this positing of nodes is really only helpful to explain why some people are vastly better able to attract phenomena than others. Like a very lucky person or vice-versa. Another illustration would be a really good artist. Many people assume that a successful artist simply has the right idea at the right time, but world-class artists seem to have more than this simple formula working for them. A good artist tells us something we recognise as a truth in an original way, and a great artist draws on something that makes their work and originality speak to other times. They draw on a muse that has many strands and are often at a loss themselves to explain how they weave it into art. They are distilling the essence of the zeitgeist. Somehow, they are devolving the spirit of the age and telling us something that we recognise as a truth. Something that we knew all along without having enunciated it. When this happens, we call it a masterpiece.

Could it be that the artist has positioned themselves on a node that devolves this creative energy? Their brains are a receiving medium for something they have unconsciously sought. It certainly seems that there have been geographical distilleries of genius like Athens or Paris in the past.

I've noticed a similar thing happen with music. I know the success of one local band can fuel the aspirations of others, but certain places whether Salzburg or Liverpool seem to throw up on occasion not just a singular bloom but a whole bouquet. Most bands, unlike artists seem to make a handful of distinctive rousing music and then atrophy. They never better their first original work, and plough the same furrow making their later compositions just variations on a theme. Yet there are rare artists that can define an era, and their work both embodies and propagates memes. Bubba Sparxx rapped, "Rhyming chose me."

As with art, science and theory leaps forward from singular people or places that seem truly inspired. Yet there are often people working on similar things but only the one that gets the credit and is remembered. If it could ever be shown that radical ideas and advances come from on high, it must be a scattergun approach where several people are simultaneously trying to establish it, and it doesn't really matter who will win the race; just that one will.

The above are speculative asides. My main thrust is that ideas, fads or philosophies can be transmitted without local contact. These are memes that can be devolved and spread within limitations or throughout all society.

Consider personal experience of how this could be. Haven't we all done something for the first time and then discovered how natural it can seem? Just like riding a bicycle, it can take a few moments and then seem like we always could do it.

Don't we all know someone that did something by chance and then it became a life's work or career?

Let's consider a body of knowledge, a recently evolved meme such as "heart surgery."

A new or trainee heart surgeon consciously learns the craft, but he/she is also memetically guided by the prior experience of others. Like acting or any trade, this memetic devolvement is best felt to be working when the subject is relaxed and have 'let themselves go'. The examples of those that did it before us are like invisible spirit guides once we are 'in the groove'.

Great men may be said to sit on the shoulders of others before them, but so it is with all activity whether it is carpentry, mothering, lying or fighting. No matter how harmful or mundane, others have built tramlines of the mind. In careers, apprentices or trainees can experience this as an arbitrary choice 'fitting like a glove'. They have discovered an aptitude or just somehow 'picked it up' without really being able to explain how. In animals of lesser consciousness, this becomes a pure instinct so that all will eat, fight and sleep in a practically identical way.

Is there evidence that learned behaviour is carried to others? One example would be when a rat finds its way through a maze. A second rat seems to find its way through the maze even quicker. In experiments, the rats have been killed (to prevent telepathy) or identical new mazes substituted (to prevent scent trails), yet despite this, rats are progressively able to get through these mazes faster than the earlier ones. Where does this knowledge reside? They are able to access a meme that is being built, a meme of knowledge about the maze.

I doubt that a meme is entirely independent of living things, but the crucial thing is that it acts as if it is. A meme has an arc of existence that like the life of a living organism is a self-contained pocket of energy.

Perhaps the best analogy of memes in the world is that they are akin to numbers. The fantastic science of mathematics has enabled us to go to the moon and inspire computers. Yet we wouldn't be able to point to a number or say, "this is a six", we could just say there are six of something. Like memes, we use the concept of number to find linking commonalities and to make something have sense for us. To grasp that which has no obvious handle.

One of my favourite examples of memetics in action is that referred to as the 100th monkey effect. It's covered in *Primates 6* (1965), and was about studies of monkeys living on a string of Japanese islands 1952-1958.

What happened was that one monkey started washing the sand off sweet potatoes, and then others started doing it. At some point, a critical mass was reached and even monkeys on other islands, though there was no obvious contact, started washing their food to remove the sand. This is almost a perfect example of a meme growing and then becoming accessible to all. A way for knowledge or learning to become transmitted to others that are not in physical contact. In human affairs, this is best seen in fashion, whereby there just seems to be zeitgeist (spirit of the age) sweeping through disparate and otherwise unconnected populations.

This 100th monkey effect was first popularized in the Lyall Watson book, *Lifetides*. Another book by Ken Keyes simply called *The Hundredth Monkey* further propagated this novel idea. Now there have been a few articles that 'revisit' these experiments (eg one from Elaine Myere) but they all seem to miss the point.

These pseudo rebuttals usually harp on about how not all the monkeys adopted this new way of washing sand off potatoes. Now Ken Keyes clearly says in his forward about this phenomenon "…almost all..," so he wasn't claiming a universal spread.

Furthermore, the 100th monkey mechanism isn't negated by this. The skeptics are confusing a hundred monkeys as somehow meaning 100%. Think of a meme such as a fashion. A few people adopt it, perhaps to widespread ridicule but at some threshold point, it becomes widely accepted. Now obviously, not every single person adopts the exact same fashion, but does this detract from the mechanism that causes it's explosive growth? Of course not. Indeed, there will ever be adherents to memes that are other fashions or the antithesis of the one currently in vogue. It can be a bit like the scene in the sci-fi movie *Fahrenheit 451* where in a book burning society, individuals each keep a certain book alive by reciting it and memorizing it.

Fashions could be similarly said to be kept alive by adherents. Victims of fashion are the ones held by the meme in a grip that has no hold on other people who have moved on to other fashions.

Critics of memetics I have found, similarly miss the point about statistics. I am not asserting that twins will all have the same experiences or that coincidences can be statistically explained or expected, like the likelihood of two people at a gathering sharing the same birthday. In fact memes explain why not everything will be the same in every case and every time.

What interests me are the coincidences that are so astronomically unlikely that they can't be configured. The one in a billion chance. Which when it happens, deserves some consideration instead of being dismissed as a one-off. These incredible coincidences are amenable to memetic explanation. I'm not claiming that fantastical coincidences are the rule. Indeed, they are the exceptions that prove the rule, but these exceptions have underlying mechanisms that make them so exceptional.

There are other examples of mass learning within species if you don't buy the 100th monkey one. One in particular was the study done on blue tits pecking at foil on milk bottles to get at the milk. Once one or two started doing it, within a short time, blue tits everywhere were doing it.

Another form of memetics in action would be the phenomenon known as the stigmata. On my model, the conscious dwelling on Christ's wounds say by Catholics or other Christians creates a meme that grows like a cloud that gathers moisture. When it has reached an optimum size, then like lightning, the meme devolves or is discharged upon some unwitting subject. This explains why the stigmata phenomenon can appear on people who aren't especially religious or even Christian.

A padre was made a saint by the pope in 2002, who had displayed the stigmata. Church enquiries couldn't find any evidence of fraud or deception. Indeed the profuse bleeding was deemed of unknown origination. The padre was especially venerated for being one of the clergy that rarely display the phenomenon.

The stigmata that occurs may have a cultural base. When the conception of Christ on the cross, changed from one of him being serene to a more realistic portrayal of the crucifixion, then the stigmata became intermittent though still rare.

Much phenomena that has been described as paranormal, unexplainable or baffling in human affairs has a memetic explanation. Reincarnation can be explained as people devolving memes built up by others. This is akin to the parable of reaping that which others sow.

The reason most people think they are Cleopatra or some famous character is that a meme has been built by people thinking about these "larger than life" historical personages. I suspect that the person claiming to be a reincarnation has taken onboard several cultural connotations that were embedded into the personage when the meme was being built.

Now there may well be knowledge imparted in a way that only the original person could have known. This is when the meme of a lesser-known person, yet having a meme built up during their own life has devolved upon someone. An example of this seemingly inexplicable phenomena, is say when a murder victim has communicated a vital but overlooked piece of crucial evidence in a dream. This would equate a very vigorous meme with a life of it's own, a soul.

A case where someone knows something they could not have, about a distant town or person is sometimes attributed to reincarnation. Once again however, it is all about meme devolvement.

Evil and goodness are gigantic memes that we can all tap into and use them to power activity. So it is that a bullet easily seems to find an innocent mark, and joy can be brought by simple acts of kindness. These memetic aids to action don't negate our actual free will, but we will find that once a choice has been made, an acceleration that can seem outside ourselves speeds us on.

An analogy or model of how we devolve memes that I like to use is that of a funfair dodgem ride. We are all connected to a gigantic grid with our minds. Now this could be Jung's collective unconscious, or a species wide area network or Sheldrake's morphic field but whatever we choose to call this grid that seems to link us all, we sometimes derive power from it and sometimes not. The sparks can fly but our action is sometimes hesitant and sometimes swift. All analogies limp and this one doesn't allow for the cars to sometimes put power into the grid but this model is useful to see how we can be linked but separate to a larger force.

Because of our memetic nature, whatever mental paths we follow, it will always be amenable to memes. Some memeticists treat memes as an infective virus and although some are devolved unwillingly and unconsciously, I don't find it helpful to use this model of contagion. Even when we have a meme that we identify and get rid of, we still have others at work albeit unidentified.

Whether memes use individuals as entry points or rain en masse upon numerous subjects, there always seem to be loci, some nodal points of focus.

PXF nodes

In the previous section, I concentrated on individual devolvement of memes. I'd now like to express some thoughts on mass devolvement. This can be a lot of memes on one person or a lot of people devolving a similar meme. This memotype can be viewed as an overlay upon the genotype. This may produce an interference pattern that provides certain nodes of contact. These nodes then become the epicentre for memes to ripple outward and whether this model is accurate or not, we have to accept that memes or new ideas have to start somewhere.

Irony is a good indicator of memetic action. Unfortunately it is usually only in retrospect that we are made aware of it. I'll come back to irony shortly.

A major devolvement of memes is something I call a PXF node. This is applauded when it is a creative flowering of the arts, and disdained (by others) when it is say a militant nationalistic chauvinism. I use the letters PXF just to show that there are multiple conduits, such as with an artmovement.

Impressionism started, and France back then became a PXF node for artistic excellence. Paris especially became a focus for painters and the success of the few was fuelled by the dreams of the many.

In a smaller way, you can see this phenomena when a music scene erupts into wider popularity. Once it was Liverpool and more recently it was Seattle. A cynic would say that the big success of one band such as the Beatles or Nirvana enabled other bands from the region to get signed to big labels, on their coat-tails. A memeticist would say that a muse or a pipeline of musical talent devolved upon the region that enabled everyone on that scene to become world class.

Bubba Sparxx rapped, "Rhyming chose me." Popular artists can incarnate memes and lead trends. By devolving the memes of the zeitgeist, they become a focus for the devotion and adulation representing it. John Lennon said at one point that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus, though that backfired somewhat.

A few artists devolved the memes of world class artistry which had a wider fallout. This then gets classified as a whole art movement. A doubter would say that the artists themselves are their own crucible forging an intellectual passion and using each other to inspire greater works. A memeticist would say the presence of a PXF node sucked in the memes that created a vast advance in that time and place. This feel of the universe flowing thru them was something that many then sensed and rose to the occasion. I think people can be attuned and be able to predict these ripples, these memetic effects. Very few are radically able to do it in a predictive or even an overtly useful way. Whether this is a skill or circumstance, every now and again we see rapid advances or creative flowerings.

A famous artist can often be a PXF node embodiment. Since their lives are usually detailed, you can spot the ironies/coincidences presaging their own induction into cultural iconhood. These PXF nodes can also be a non-living icon too, such as the flag or a city symbol, that become almost a memetic deity.

The devolvement of memes upon inanimate objects is what would normally be classed as miraculous phenomena. Now this belongs in the advanced thinking on memetics and for now I'll just make a couple of suggestions like weeping statuary that are examples of this. We anthropomorphise the moon ('the man in the moon') or the face on Mars, but could some memetic terraforming be helping the process along?

This is all fantastic stuff but let's not forget the more prosaic everyday things. Memes are in ordinary things, like having a meme of 'watching television' or even toilet habits that people do without any thought as to where the behaviour came from. Most people can't be so analytical or self referential and live a "normal" life, so they don't get philosophical about everything.

When a person becomes aware of memetic influences, then I think you can use them without trying too hard to use them. You kind of decide what you want in the back of your mind without lust of result. Then later, when you've forgotten almost about it, an opportunity will enable you to get the thing you wanted. An example might be that I want a red mustang say. So I don't dwell on it or peruse the car sales. Then when I've no longer a conscious yearning for it, I'll see a bargain priced one or a friend will offer to loan me one or something along those lines. This can seem magical or mystical and coincidental, but is how memetics works.

Irony

Irony is a by-product of the reaction of memes upon our lives. Memes are dynamic and attracted to certain conductors, they cause a reaction that can leave irony in it's wake.

Irony can seem like just one of those things but as an ironical twist of fate can quickly demonstrate, you ignore its potential at some risk. I'm sure that Christopher Reeve, the actor that played Superman and now finds himself a cripple has ruminated about irony.

Ironical things can happen because our mental life isn't static. I would say that even when nothing much seems to be going on, the dynamism of memes are affecting our lives. You can do an experiment to show this dynamism of memes. For instance, think a few seconds about something that you don't necessarily encounter...say for example UFOs. Alright, you think a minute then forget about it. Right, at the point you just about forget about them and only your unconscious brain retains the thought, then a meme will attach to attract other examples of what it is you was thinking about. I know this sounds esoteric, but it is how life imitates art. So anyway, within a few days there should be references that you come across pertaining to the thought. This might be a trailer on TV or a conversation with a friend, and when you get really good at it, there will be myriad coincidences of this sort and it will seem like you are almost creating the universe as you go along.

Of course unless you are on LSD or something, we rarely achieve this flow. Ironically the opposite of that which we intended can happen. Irony is often an indicator of memes in action. Because of what I believe about memes inoculating themselves, a good meme can appear sometimes to be a bad one and vice versa. This is an ironical twist in that to achieve a result you have to take a course that seems to lead away from it. Like the legend of the Holy Grail, those that seek it won't find it.

My take on actions leading to unintended results is that memes naturally contain their opposite. This seems contradictory but when you create a meme like a theory or a business, the successful meme inoculates itself by incorporating it's opposite. Like the exception that proves the rule, the universe can seem to be governed by a cosmic joker. This leads psychologists to postulate 'death wishes' or indeed all kinds of stuff that would seem counter productive to long life.

Irony is with us in many mundane ways but we are blind to it. An action we take to avoid something can often precipitate the very thing we wish to avoid. A dramatic example of this could be the lady who was worried by gas pressure fluctuations. She decided to replace it with an electric oven but it was faulty and exploded killing her. A true story from the 1980's I read about. Now usually, our ironies aren't as final but neither so well documented. If you look for irony and coincidence without lust of result, you can find them. On a personal level, I might think of someone and then see on television, a city where we once were. Not a radical irony but typical of mundane ones.

An example of mundane irony is when Ted Heath was prime minister of England. For reasons I forget, he was nicknamed "The Grocer" or "Grocer Heath." He was succeeded to the party leadership by Margaret Thatcher, a bona fide grocer's daughter.

Politics is often rich in irony. Someone helped to power is often the nemesis of the helper. Shades of biting the hand that feeds you! On a personal level, it seems to me that political systems that are supposedly for the benefit of most people, actually benefit the least such as communism. Whereas the ostensibly greedy system of capitalism seems to have wide ranging benefits for all. Now that's just my personal belief, not an ax I'm grinding as part of memetic theory but consider this. If it wasn't for some greedy avid collector of certain artefacts (say Greek urns or Russian ikons), then the coherent collection of artefacts that is often bequeathed to a museum and for public display would not have been assembled.

Another example, a personal irony, was when I bought a cheap retread for a tire at a distant location from my home in 1988. A few weeks went by, and on the freeway a brown cloud and a bang informed me that something serious had happened. I thought it was the engine at first and miraculously skewed across four lanes and down an exit ramp coming to a stop outside the very tire sellers I'd bought the now disintegrated tire.

I've had several "confirming experiences" that show irony and coincidence and memetic flow to have combined threads. Usually, I can demo this to others by asking them to describe a phenomenon that they don't understand and then give a memetic explanation. Another way is to listen to someone talk and then predict some irony that may only become apparent in retrospect.

Name pairings and attractions can be oten seen as ironic. What this shows is that concepts and connotations that we put names to have a kinetic life and interaction. Memetic attachments echo down the ages regularly and take us by surprise. Such as an unexplained block of ice from the sky falling upon the car of an anomalous weather researcher. Even memeticists aren't immune to irony or the whims of fate but are better placed to explain them. Hidden connotations in wordplay can generate irony. Let's say someone is unconscious of a name's hidden meaning or heritage or even an anagram of it, they can devolve memes to do with it. A kind of memetic pull steers their destiny without them being aware of it.

The devolution of unbidden memes has serious implications for what we consider to be our free will. It's one thing for a meme to help us do something, and another thing for us to do something because a meme has been devolved.

Free will

Memes by their action on unaware human carriers would also seem to sometimes "choose" their carriers. Like fame, some people are born with memes, some achieve them, and others have them thrust upon them. Like the stigmata phenomena, or other groupings of similar phenomena, the person on whom the it impinges can seem unwilling to carry the meme. A natural leader could deny his calling until (like the sword in the stone), there is no other choice.

The Hobson's choice of all destiny may well appear to be a choice to ourselves but actually not. As in the selfish gene book, much behaviour that seems to be altruistic or some such can be the opposite of what was conceived to be. *The Selfish Gene* had a lot about selfish behaviour being seemingly altruistic due to memes and I would further that line and say that much of what we think of as free will is actually not.

Phenomena such as simultaneous discovery, either of a theory or a device would make it feasible that ideas outside ourselves are just waiting to be grabbed. Composers and musicians especially subscribe to the theory that a muse inspires them and blesses them by having a tune just pop into their head. Scientists and inventors describe a similar process of inspiration. Kekule was trying to figure out the structure of benzene when he dreamt of a snake eating it's own tail and then realised only a ring could explain it's molecular form. Calculus was a mathematical theory simultaneously developed independently by both Newton and Leibniz.

Whilst there will always be physicists working towards similar goals, there are enough examples of inspiration to suspect that memes can be handed down. When simultaneous discoveries happen, you might suspect a scattergun approach. Or maybe it's just the non-locality of human mental events? This non-local suggestion is surely how one's learning can be transferred to an unconnected other. It is the very heart of this memetics.

Just as quantum mechanics has had to use concepts of nonlocality with Bell's theorem, so memetics has a corresponding echo.

This meme devolving upon unwitting subjects concept can be added to our interdependence on others and us all being victims of circumstance to suggest that perhaps "moral stance" is our only true area of free will. It's possible that memes choose us rather than the other way round, and I would like to develop experiments or tests that investigate this hypothesis. Possibly studies of large families may shed some clues in this area, as I've been fascinated how large families can often contain both a crook and a cop. When we say that in life, we have to play the cards that we're dealt, memetics may indeed show this to be truth. Devolving memes may determine our options more than we could normally accept. What we rationally consider to be ourselves, may be nothing more than a list of consumer choices intertwined with moral ones.

Consider an artist or songwriter. They have often described the muse as choosing them. Many songwriters and composers have described the song or music just coming into their head, and they merely wrote it down. Many scientific breakthroughs or other inspirational thinking has come upon people by dreams or whilst they were in a relaxed reflective mood. Typical examples might be Archimedes jumping out of his bath, and running naked down the street and yelling "Eureka," or Newton having an apple fall on his head etc, etc....

A child prodigy that composes music may simply be abler at accessing a bank of musical information. All this would imply that memes could have an independent existence and source other than ourselves. This is another area that needs careful consideration and research, although the above examples may simply be forms of facilitating human invention and not remotely associated with devolving memes.

If living in London, is drinking water that has already been drunk before, and Los Angeles is breathing someone else's exhaust, could thinking on an idea be thinking something that's already been thunk?

"There's nothing new under the sun," goes the old saw, and those that don't remember history are condemned to repeat it. But what if a burgeoning population actually allows new ideas to thrive, to provide a wider base for supporting memes? Perhaps a larger world of people allows more progressions to be devolved?

Having intimated that memes may choose us, people do seem able to attract certain memes. Whether a person has to be reflective or have a high sense of self-consciousness or awareness of self, is not clear. Like 'greatness', some people seem to be born with some memes, others achieve them and others have them thrust upon them. A fruitful area of investigation would be the nature of invention or genius. To try and ascertain whether the subject considers the source of his or her inspiration as within or without themselves.

This new broad theory suggests many areas of research. The explanatory power of it, should cause us to re-examine areas that would be considered irrelevant or unimportant by those blind to the many ways that we do seem able to influence the world around us. Pubescent girls are often present at the site of poltergeist phenomena, and though this an unproven link, could it not be that we can all have an effect, albeit of a much less dramatic nature, on our immediate world. I suspect that memes devolve and can be attracted, without any of us being aware of how and why. Through reflection and self-consciousness, we can transcend this memetic determinism and maybe even move mountains or work miracles with understanding and a little bit of faith.

There are ways that we can create our own "luck." It could be construed as God helping those that help themselves or it could be we all have the ability to bend reality to our advantage. I certainly believe that any of us can attract references or phenomena associated with something that is 'on our mind'. You can do a simple test to show this. Think of something incongruous like a first world war soldier, something that you wouldn't normally think about or come across. Think of this subject several times during the day. Now very shortly (usually a three day window) thereafter, I've personally found several references to whatever it was I thought about. Maybe it was just a magazine in the newsagents or a TV advert or someone discussing the subject. Now I know this can sound a bit like hoodoo voodoo or sympathetic magic, but it is a very simple test anyone can do that shows the fabric of memetic correspondence.

This is also the reason that a customs officer knows a smuggler without really knowing why a hunch works. This is why people who lose a wedding ring can catch the very fish that swallowed it or cook it for dinner. Or a man studying unusual weather can have a block of ice, fall onto his car. Perhaps why lovers were made for each other.

Some people have a developed lightning rod that attracts phenomena. We might tag them "lucky" or "unlucky," or just marvel at how certain things always seem to happen to them.

Some people may even be able to create their own reality. Haven't we all had the experience of wanting something (say a particular colour and model of a car) and just about when we've given up hope of finding one at a price we can afford, a friend of a friend turns up with one at a deal of a price. This potential to affect the world in ways that we wish things to be may be an evolutionary strategy. Is it only wish fulfilment or is it something else? When I see a bluebottle housefly wait patiently on a door to enter the house, is it a tactic or does it instigate what will happen? It would seem unlikely that a fly could influence the future, but memetics can be a kind of wish fulfilment that has an actual reality with time. Not always wishes. When a train crashes, ironically a year to the day after another crash, could this have been a consequence of many minds having dwelt upon the subject? A stigmata upon society? Maybe the superstitions about speaking no evil are based upon a memetic truth? Whether memes choose us more than we choose them, has got to be the most interesting area of memetic research. Memes have been regarded as evolutionary tools in their narrow sense, but their role in a broader sense can be ever so much more dramatic for evolution.

Evolution

Memetics offers a way to reconcile simple creationism with Darwinism. Evolutionary advances are not contradicted by divine dispensation. The lack of a fossil record of missing links has always been a problem with evolutionary theory, and Creationists feel there are many aspects of life that point to an intelligent designer. A site that lists some of these anthropomorphic coincidences from a physicist's point of view is here http://web.archive.org/web/20020203164144/http://www.nashville.com/~al.schroeder/anthcoi.htm. This will be too technical for most people and what appeals generally as a designer argument is how well adapted are the varieties of life upon this planet. The fossil record such as of dinosaurs shows that there were once animals that no longer exist, now whether these were one-off creations or have evolved into something else is a debate that has no absolute answer. If they did evolve into say birds, the jump to another shape must have been sudden as there are no intermediate species. Memetics offers a way to explain the mechanism of evolutionary jumps.

Darwin's survival of the fittest has explained the variations within species, such as why dark butterflies may have an advantage over light ones during the industrial revolution. But there are many areas unexplained. Why for instance have all the mammals we are familiar with, reached an evolutionary plateau? A Darwinian might say that the changes are so gradual, that we can't see them. Yet many lifeforms have remained static for millennia. Fish like the coelacanth, once thought to be an extinct ancestor of today's fish are regularly dredged up from the deep. They have remained unchanged for thousands if not millions of years, as the fossil record shows. Also, it's incredibly difficult to see exactly how an animal can survive and prosper if it hasn't reached their optimum evolutionary potential. How for instance could a spider evolve it's complex web spinning mechanism? It either had it or it didn't, as spinning a useless web on the way to evolving an effective one, seems peculiar. In fact, evolution seems to have made sudden gigantic leaps rather than gradual ones over eons. The black obelisk of Clarke and Kubrick's *2001* that triggers a new evolutionary phase seems unlikely but may have more of a ring of truth about it than Darwin's theory. My favourite Darwin story is that when he returned home after two years from his travels, his father marvelled and exclaimed, "The shape of his head is completely different!"

Recently a pine tree has been discovered in Australia's Blue mountains, near Katoomba. It has remained unchanged and is the same as fossils from 150 million years ago. Kind of knocks the idea of evolving life into a cocked hat I would say. Now within a species, we can easily see how the environment may favour dark or light moths and so such characteristics become prevalent. But the big thrust of evolutionists that life is constantly evolving simply isn't borne out..

The theory of Lamarckism was subsumed by the Darwinian model, but claimed that acquired characteristics could be inherited. So for instance, the Lamarckian would say that if I were a carpenter, then my son would be better able to handle wood. Now actually, the memetic model has an affinity with Lamarckism, but the difference is that characteristics are not necessarily inherited. They can be passed through a bloodline, but they can just as easily be transferred to someone that isn't related. This theory of memetics can explain the discrepancies that Lamarck couldn't.

How this could work in practice is that a species wide desire can translate into an evolutionary jump. Let's say that we had a high level of consciousness but were restricted to the body of a fly on a door. Our self-awareness would be limited to that of our experience, but we could form a rudimentary desire for the door to open. This would create a meme that could enact a progression of events that gave us what we wanted, or alternatively it could manifest a species wide evolutionary jump that caused us to develop door opening tools like arms and legs.

These assertions are less amenable to research than some of the other aspects of memetic theory. However, I display them here to show just how radical a paradigm shift would be, once we accept the reality of memes.

When something has been described as instinctual, there seems never an explanation of how this mechanism works. Memetics explains how instinct and innate behaviours operate.

When a school of fish turn as one, or when ants act in consort, we seem willing to accept the existence of a group mind, but what is that if not a meme?

Evolutionists themselves are starting to express that evolution has a lot of problems as a theory. Not the least of which is a lack of evidence. Recent thinkers on the subject such as Stephen Jay Gould examined the Burgess shale, a strata of fossils and found co-existing species, and a plethora of life forms that casts doubt on the idea that complex life has arisen out of more simple life from eons ago. They were always complex.

My memetics can explain the emergence of differing species as a series of jumps that utilise species wide memes. So there are vestiges of species in other species but no discernable evolutionary transition.

Anyway, here from an anti-evolution tract are some quotes from scientists that spell out many of the problems with evolution as an acceptable theory:

"The pathetic thing is that we have scientists who are trying to prove evolution, which no scientist can ever prove." [Dr. Robert Millikan, Nobel Prize winner and eminent evolutionist.]

"The theory of evolution suffers from grave defects, which are more and more apparent as time advances. It can no longer square with practical scientific knowledge." [Dr. A. Fleishmann, Zoologist, Erlangen University.]

"It is good to keep in mind...that nobody has ever succeeded in producing even one new species by the accumulation of micro-mutations. Darwin's theory of natural selection has never had any proof, yet it has been universally accepted." [Professor R. Goldschmidt, Ph.D., DSc Prof. Zoology, University of California, in *Material Basis of Evolution,* Yale University Press.]

"It is easy enough to make up stories, of how one form gave rise to another, and to find reasons why the stages should be favoured by natural selection. But such stories are not part of science, for there is no way of putting them to the test." [Luther D. Sutherland, *Darwin's Enigma,* Master Books 1988, page 89.]

"Is it really credible that random processes could have constructed a reality, the smallest element of which -- a functional protein or gene -- is complex beyond...anything produced by the intelligence of man?" [Michael Denton, molecular biologist, Evolutionist: A Theory in Crisis (London: Burnett Books, 1985) page 342.]

"When I make an incision with my scalpel, I see organs of such intricacy that there simply hasn't been enough time for natural evolutionary processes to have developed them." [C. Everett Koop, former U.S. Surgeon General.]

"Modern apes...seem to have sprung out of nowhere. They have no yesterday, no fossil record. And the true origin of modern humans...is, if we are to be honest with ourselves, an equally mysterious matter." [Lyall Watson, Ph.D., evolutionist.]

"Although bacteria are tiny, they display biochemical, structural and behavioural complexities that outstrip scientific description. In keeping with the current microelectronics revolution, it may make more sense to equate their size with sophistication rather than with simplicity...Without bacteria, life on earth could not exist in its present form." [James A. Shipiro, "Bacteria as Multicellular Organisms," *Scientific American,* vol. 258, no. 6, June, 1988.]

"That a mindless, purposeless, chance process such as natural selection, acting on the sequels of recombinant DNA or random mutation, most of which are injurious or fatal, could fabricate such complexity and organisation as the vertebrate eye, where each component part must carry out its own distinctive task in a harmoniously functioning optical unit, is inconceivable. The absence of transitional forms between the invertebrates retina and that of the vertebrates poses another difficulty. Here there is a great gulf fixed which remains inviolate with no seeming likelihood of ever being bridged. The total picture speaks of intelligent creative design of an infinitely higher order." [H.S. Hamilton, M.D., *The Retina of the Eye--An Evolutionary Road Block.*]

"My attempts to demonstrate evolution by an experiment carried on for more than 40 years have completely failed." [N.H. Nilson, famous botanist and evolutionist.]"None of five museum officials could offer a single example of a transitional series of fossilised organisms that would document the transformation of one basically different type to another." [Luther Sunderland, science researcher.]

"Not one change of species into another is on record...we cannot prove that a single species has been changed." [Charles Darwin, *My Life and Letters.*]

"[...] most people assume that fossils provide a very important part of the general argument in favour of Darwinian interpretations of the history of life. Unfortunately, this is not strictly true." [Dr. David Raup, Curator of Geology, Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.]

"Despite the bright promise that palaeontology provides means of 'seeing' Evolution, it has provided some nasty difficulties for evolutionists, the most notorious of which is the presence of 'gaps' in the fossil record. Evolution requires intermediate forms between species and palaeontology does not provide them." [David Kitts, Ph.D., "Palaeontology and Evolutionary Theory," *Evolution,* vol. 28, September 1974, page 467.]

"The fact that a theory so vague, so insufficiently verifiable, and so far from the criteria otherwise applied in 'hard' science has become a dogma can only be explained on sociological grounds." [Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, biologist.]

"Micromutations do occur, but the theory that these alone can account for evolutionary change is either falsified, or else it is an unfalsifiable, hence metaphysical theory. I suppose that nobody will deny that it is a great misfortune if an entire branch of science becomes addicted to a false theory. But this is what has happened in biology....I believe that one day the Darwinian myth will be ranked the greatest deceit in the history of science. When this happens many people will pose the question: How did this ever happen?" [S. Lovtrup, *Darwinism: The Refutation of a Myth,* London: Croom Helm, page 422.]

"The uniform, continuous transformation of Hyracotherium into Equus, so dear to the hearts of generations of textbook writers, never happened in nature." [George Simpson, paleontologist and evolutionist]

"As is well known, most fossil species appear instantaneously in the fossil record." [Tom Kemp, Oxford University.]

"The curious thing is that there is a consistency about the fossil gaps; the fossils are missing in all the important places." [Francis Hitching, archeologist.]

"If Evolution were true, we should find literally millions of fossils that show how one kind of life slowly and gradually changed to another kind of life. But missing links are the trade secret, in a sense, of paleontology. The point is, the links are still missing. What we really find are gaps that sharpen up the boundaries between kinds." [Dr. Gary Parker, biologist/paleontologist and former ardent evolutionist.]

"Evolution requires intermediate forms between species and palaeontology does not provide them." [David Kitts, paleontologist and evolutionist.]

There are plenty of other quotes that dispute evolution, and not just from creationist or religious perspectives. I suspect that the theory became popularised by secularists and humanists that wanted an alternative (any alternative) to theological thinking. Although widely embraced as seeming likely, there are a number of unanswered questions. Any evolution as such that may have occurred was no gradual incremental sort but a species-wide jump. Biologists have touted mutations as explaining such jumps but mutations don't hold up as such anomalies usually make the organism perform less efficiently or detrimentally. I am not aware of any mutations have ever allowed a creature to operate more successfully. Like the science fiction explanations that create Superman or X-ray man, such mutations are fiction.

Only memes and memetic theory can explain evolutionary jumps.

Memetic Rationality

When a meme devolves, it changes our worldview and thereby our rationality. It is a common assumption that our rationality is constant, but if you look at how people talk or act, you see that consciousness is a major player.

Differing levels of consciousness are more or less varied when it comes to grasping memes. Like a mild form of schizophrenia, our beliefs vary according to our mental state. Many of us may have had the experience of knowing or intending to do something when we are in a particular state such as in love or drunk or otherwise intoxicated. Back to normal, we forget all about it, but when the state is again repeated, we re-remember that which had been closed to us until then. The more time we spend in a particular state, we are constructing another memetic reality of ourselves. Eventually, this new personality can supplant our normal self.

The point I'm making is that rationality is just not the static benchmark that we can refer to. All belief systems can be coherent and all can seem true at certain times. This is why a meme can devolve and not cause a conflict with someone's belief system. You only have to see two antagonists arguing vehemently to realise that there is no time for considered and reasoned responses. Neither are pausing for breath and mustering arguments. Both are aware of the other's mutually exclusive viewpoint, and instinctively shoot from the lip.

Hypnotism also demonstrates the myth of objective rationality. When a hypnotised subject explains why they did something upon a prompt, there is no shortage of inventive rationales that would usually be acceptable, were we not already aware of the speaker's hypnotised state. In a similar manner, we could claim that anyone is hypnotised by the beliefs that they have adopted. The phrases of rational justification can colourfully reflect a worldview. Many turns of phrase today, have derived from the rural norms of yesteryear. We could be described as "sitting on a fence," or be 'closing the door after the horse has bolted' and the like. All this indicates that we are being used by a rationale rather more than we are using it. And one day we may even be able to claim that people have been hypnotised by the memes that have devolved upon them.

Our commonly accepted notions of rationality is that we are confronted with events or phenomena and after consideration, choose the most rational or the one that fits most evidence. I would say this is incorrect and that rationality is a way of filtering out evidence that doesn't fit. We act more like a prosecuting lawyer than any judge and cherry-pick testimony and evidence that supports our case. The stuff that detracts from our position we castigate. It has evolved this way as an evolutionary stratagem to come to quick decisions for action. Instead of weighing evidence, we make an emotional decision on what is right and then look for indications that this is true.

Psychology shows over and over that people do things for reasons different to what they say. The depth and ingenuity of reasoning from hypnotised or angry subjects upon a prompt no matter how ridiculous show that justifications can be a sham. Reasoning like rhetoric or oratory can be more parts emotion than logic, and even when seemingly unemotional is simply an instinctive defence of someone's position. There are ever arguments for and against every position. In reality you feel or sense the right answer. We choose our rationality and thereby choose our answers. We can within bounds decide one thing or another, but people could never explicate their starting premises before a reasoned discussion. If we could agree upon common assumptions and proceed from there, we could rate belief by rankings as a sports table. Criteria such as logic, inner coherence or explanatory power could be used to rate theories just as we can acknowledge Arsenal as a top football team within the football league.

Rational thinking is often a wolf in sheep's clothing because it can seem innocuous and not linked to the propounders sense of self, but they are always inextricably linked. This personal dimension often renders real debate unlikely. Rather than weighing testimony, the person arguing a position is acting more as a defence or prosecuting lawyer, using only arguments that support their case. This isn't really seeking truth but conviction.

If a person was really seeking understanding or truth, they would have to come up with a scenario or evidence that would disprove their position. To truly test a belief you have to know or acknowledge what would falsify it.

Memetics is for people that are honestly excited by an idea. It's okay to acknowledge that you can accept it because it fits in with how you feel about something. Those that revere long lengthy reasoning as if they are a judge will find the case for memetics here. They think they are interviewing this theory for a place in their rationality but memetics by its very nature is something you will accept quickly or never can.

Correspondence and Echoes

As I claimed earlier, all coincidence is a form of memetic correspondence. We can see this correspondence in things that aren't especially coincidental. I'll give you an example that I noticed when I lived in Ocean Park in the mid 80's. There was a lot of 'street people' in the area and especially on an evening, you would come across several grubbed out people mumbling, talking and outright ranting to themselves. They were in their own private world that excluded the passers by. Now fast forward several years beyond the gentrification and yuppiefication of the area, where property prices had soared. Visiting Main Street, I was surprised to find numerous people walking and talking on mobile phones in their own little world. Most staggeringly, I saw someone yelling (though with a mobile ear piece) at the very same spot that a notorious drunk, a street alcoholic had once staked out as his patch. It's not really a coincidence, but it is an echo.

Perhaps certain places can attract or devolve a meme that recurs in certain actions? Perhaps certain places are much more amenable to holiness or criminality so that there is an architecture that shapes our behavior? Going up a mountain and coming down with a changed memetic reality may have truth. A sense of place may very well be necessary for certain memes to be devolved. These are certain areas that need to be considered. However, this is certainly not an absolute occurrence. I've visited many spots reputed for their evil connections such as a haunted room or murder location or site of a Nazi rally, but have not detected any sense of evil there. They are usually remarkably benign or innocuous in their sense of place.

However rare it is that a place can affect one's rationality, I do believe that it does happen. Another example that I can offer is when as an "inter-railer" round Europe, I slept on the beach at Eze-sur-mer. For a diversion, I took the deserted footpath to the hilltop village of Eze one day and felt intellectually charged. Nothing revelatory, just a vivid afternoon that was possibly the highlight of my whole trip. Many years later, by one of those happenstance references, I discovered that the trail was also once known as Nietzsche's path from when the philosopher used to walk it. Apparently he wrote the latter chunk of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* amongst the olives and pines there. When you reach the top after over an hour's walk, you are bamboozled by the sudden bustle, but lower down I felt connected to something outside of myself.

The cycles of life are rarely viewed as something that recurs in all generations and times. Love is an emotion that is intensely experienced by each generation as if for the first time. Only those that can take a step back through wisdom or age can see the constantly recurring tides.

This is where memetics is able to provide explanations for the puzzle. This tide, this governing of life, the recurring of events is a correspondence that echoes through all generations. For instance, we think we might have left the bacchanalian rites of village festivals behind, but really all we have done is supplanted them. Package holidays of booze and sex are just an evolved echo of what was and always will be.

Anytime we see an echo or correspondence, especially in things or events that we normally would not consider related, we are seeing the action of a meme.

When the lifestyle aggregation of music, fashion and outlook called 'punk' started, it really seemed to spread during 1978. I went to the USA that summer and hitch-hiked about. One thing that puzzled me was that I kept running into people who seemed to be 'punk' yet had not yet heard of the term. They had the philosophy, torn or bound clothing and sometimes the spiky hairstyle, yet they hadn't yet heard of the 'Sex Pistols'. I suspected some kind of cosmic con especially when I met one guy almost a clone of Sid Vicious that insisted he'd never heard of him. How was it possible that people had adopted a fashion in advance of widespread media attention? With this phenomenon to ponder, I started developing my "one in every town" theory. I postulated that every small town has a drunk, a real redneck, a punk kid etc. As the towns get larger, the cast of characters increase. Added to this was the strange sense of déjà vu when I met someone that was 90% of somebody else I'd met or the spitting image of someone from my hometown. I was regularly surprised to find a Dave who liked wrangler clothes, drank hard and had a girlfriend called Sue just like someone else I'd already met. I started to make boyfriend/girlfriend name pairings that seemed to recur often enough to seem a standard. If I met a "Carl," I'd guess he had a girlfriend called Sarah before he told me he did. In life, there are all manner of possible permutations or simple juxtapositions, but memes can make them into regular pairing; a temporary bondage.

Each bar I went in, had its resident lush and a "Mr. can get it." Each place I went had the same types of people. I'd talk about this phenomenon with friends and claim "there's one in every town." Like a hen's pecking order, I've come to realise that human types are similarly governed. You remove one and another will take up that role.

A startling possibility is that if certain memes can be linked with certain places, then there's no reason that memes couldn't become attached to certain genes.

Memes are across all racial lines, and I've noticed a line of eye or a distinctive quirk in someone fresh out the jungle that has reminded me of a sophisticated urban acquaintance. We have more in common than we have differences, though I suspect traits and tendencies along family bloodlines can be cemented into place by memetic action.

A memetic template that guides developing phenomena would not be impossible. A meme is what gives certain characteristics to a social development as a gene can choose genetic characteristics. We can't see the meme but we may well be able to test for its operation. There could well be a meme that guides physical similarities as diverse as a river pattern and blood capillaries and the veins of a leaf. There is often a correspondence across many fields that could denote a meme governing the patterns that we usually dismiss as too diverse to be related.

Memes and genes may be linked in ways we have yet to even fathom. On April 12th 2002, I was struck by a news report about an Englishman stabbed to death in Orleans, France. He had gone there for the funeral of his daughter, killed by a hit and run driver. This unfortunate coincidence of two killed separately would make me suspect a intertwining of their family with France and with death. I have not researched it, but would fully expect that their ancestors would have also experienced this tragic combination. I would have expected that prior family members had been killed in France during the world wars or the Napoleonic and 100 years war. I would bet money that somewhere in the past, there is a mortal French connection.

Throughout history, we have stories of cursed objects or very unlucky things that somehow are imbued with tragedy. Earlier I mentioned the 2001 Selby train crash. Only in the Scottish Herald, as far as I know, was that some of that train's carriages had also been involved in a prior fatal train crash in London. Memes and places and things and genes are all up for consideration.

Memes are probably the reason for unusual physical effects that we sometimes see. In nature we see all kinds of odd mimicry. We can easily appreciate the defensive potential of a moth that has cat's eyes on its wings, but are harder put to explain the advantage of some other similarities. Those nuts that resemble a woman's thighs are only native to a few islands and are remarkable. More profuse are the shells, clams and flowers that can resemble sex organs. Quite how memes can cause a physical form, is similar to the idea of them being a template. So it is that some couples can grow to resemble each other, or there is a marked similarity between owners and their pets.

As well as living things, we can also see the meme operate as a template on inanimate matter. Did the man in the moon arise as a terraformed response to our anthropomorphic tendencies? Thousands of years may have been necessary, but then what of the face on Mars?

Perhaps the clouds reflect the preoccupations of the people below? On a round-Europe train trip, I saw the outstretched wing of an angel in clouds above Spain. A Catholic type angel at that. Over Bavaria, I noted foaming beer steins, yet in Portugal, the clouds all looked like the tunny fish so important to the local economy. The mashed potato style of clouds became the puffy faces of trolls over Norway and as the train moved to the arctic circle, the sky seemed closer with striated wisps of wizard beards as if drawn by Blake. Of course, the lucid quality of a trip spent sleeping on trains helped observations such as these. But let me mention a curious cloudplay I saw on Manhattan Island.

I'd been out and about late and had no particular place to go. Being a warm night, I decided to sleep on some clean cardboard in an alley. The predawn trash trucks woke me, and I looked up into an owl made by clouds. Round holes for eyes each contained a single twinkling star, and the high buildings framed the owl in a picture-perfect manner. It was an interesting image but I hadn't dwelt upon it for many years until one day I read something about the original Indians of Manhattan by chance. It said that an owl was the spirit that ruled the island.

Coincidence undoubtedly, yet as I said earlier, all coincidence is just a correspondence in the memetic fabric. Perhaps the owl now manifests itself through numerous people that wear round glasses without really understanding their preference?

Another phenomena that has an echo which I've noticed would seem to be a statistical pattern. In a way that I haven't yet defined, I believe a memetic template or pattern is at work. I'm thinking about a crowd at a football match and some evenly distributed actions of this crowd such as lighting cigarettes. Back when I was a child and at a football match, more people seemed to smoke in those days. At an evening game you would see a constant distribution of flickers in the mass of the crowd as individuals lit cigarettes. Even then, I would ponder at how a flicker here would be followed by a flicker over there. There was never an uneven pattern in one area of the crowd mass, and the flames from lighters in use would be evenly distributed despite assumedly a random component. A statistician would probably accept this marvel as simple statistical truth and I can understand it somewhat. But imagine my surprise a generation later when people didn't smoke as much but I saw an echo of this pattern at a game. Within the mass of spectators were flashes from cameras. A flash in one area would be followed by a flash down there and then at another place. While I realize this even distribution has a statistical explanation, I can't help thinking that this random cohesion is part of a memetic template that governs the behavior of crowds.

An example of a memetic template is that what we call "culture." A "tailgate party" would be a type of memetic culture and from Maine to San Diego or wherever Americans have gathered for a tailgate party, there will be parallels or echoes of similarity there. When Britain stamped out an empire in wildly different locations, there was always that memetic template ensuring a correspondence that echoed in snooker clubs, churches and train stations wherever they were. These templates are just a device to make the action of memes more understandable to us, yet there are repeated patterns that recur often enough to suspect that "Britishness" or "American" or indeed any cultural attribute is factory produced.

Cultural attributes have many links and connotations, though even without an enunciated list, we are able to describe something as French style or as typically Japanese. So for now, let's just look at something with minimal links. Simple recurring pairings may give memetic insights.

Pairings

I mentioned how certain name pairings can seem not just fashionable but linked often enough to suspect a meme is helping along the bond. A Jack and Diane, a Carl and Sarah can be linked not just as couples, but as siblings or work combinations or as a parent and child. There seems to be a zeitgeist, a sort of memetic glue that ensures these combinations happen in one form if not the other. This glue isn't permanent but does seem to exist for a certain period of cultural time. This cultural playing field could be useful for mapping memes though it is unlikely to be as clear as florescent lines upon a dark background. Memes can act as molecules either attaching themselves to preferred objects, people and phenomena and perhaps they are the cement that brings things together.

A fisherman that senses his catch of fish or there being a girl for every boy are things that can be helped to come together by memes. This would then be why certain pairings tend to recur.

When Armand Hammer acquired the company called Arm and Hammer, was this bringing together enhanced by memes or simple linguistic coincidence? He undoubtedly wanted to acquire it because it resembled his name so much. Since this was a one-off, I can't press this as an example of memetic pairing, though I think it can indicate other more mundane sound-alike groupings.

Headline writers use this sound-alike device all the time, as do poets and rap artists that rhyme a person to a sound-alike activity. The interesting question for me is whether destiny can have a gravitational pull, and along the direction of a sound-alike word?

Sound-alike destiny apart, there are other pairings that seem coincidentally or unusually attracted to each other. For instance, an incident at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. It was written about by

Ted Morgan in *Literary Outlaw* (pg 446). Jean Genet was pursued by police at a street riot and ran into an apartment building to escape. He knocked upon a door at random exclaiming, "C'est Monsieur Genet." It turned out to be the apartment of a graduate student writing a thesis on him and his writing.

Such incidents are frequently dismissed as coincidence. Yet coincidences happen often enough that we can examine them for insight.

Coincidence

We all are subject to trivial coincidences that don't portend or really indicate anything. It is the nature of mathematics to show us a form, a pattern in something we thought to be formless. For instance I had a friend that I'd see irregularly with no especial agenda or set activity, just meet up or visit every now and again. Looking back in an old diary, I was amazed to find that we had got together on the 27th of every month yet not for any conscious reason. This kind of pattern doesn't really mean anything yet there are coincidental patterns that may indicate memes. Folk wisdom has it that events can come in threes, and folk wisdom in general may well indicate phenomena that can be investigated for memetic patterns.

Coincidences almost by definition happen in an unconscious way. As I have claimed earlier, memes operate better when they aren't focussed upon. When we are unaware of their influence, we are repeatedly surprised by memetic action.

Synchronicity, fortunate happenstance, serendipity and coincidence are all part of memetic correspondence. It is memetics that links related events and the force that reconciles separated parts as when a submariner finds his old hairbrush on a suburban beach thousands of miles away from where his submarine had been torpedoed and he barely escaped with his life. It is this memetic force that makes the hairs on the back of a customs officer's neck stand on end when in the presence of a smuggler irrespective of any real clues. When a wife loses a wedding ring and it turns up in a fish dinner is another example of which there are many documented cases. These are coincidences that are repeatedly dismissed as one-offs yet recur regularly enough to make an astute person suspect a real force at work.

I well understand the marvels of statistics and how in a roomful of people, it is likely that two will share a birthday. These are not the type of coincidences that I class as indicative of memetic action.

The kind that of coincidences that I am interested in are the ones that seem so unlikely that you wouldn't even make them up. Stuff like the 1911 slaying of Sir Edmund of Greenberry Hill. Unaware of the man's identity, the killers proved to be three men called Green, Berry and Hill.

The correspondences between the presidency and assassinations of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy have long been commented upon. Stuff like the killer going from a theatre to a library and vice-versa to correspondences between dates to secretarial names to both presidents having been in Monroe the week before are funny and fascinating. Uncanny you might say, but the plethora of linkage to me shows that a memetic groove of sorts had been worn.

The mechanistic models I've seen trying to portray memes in action usually look like an oversimplified flow-chart. Personally I find models of action to be missing the point. A bit like theologians debating how many angels will fit on a pinhead. They are reaching for a visibility that will elude.

I do use models though strictly for illustrative purposes. They are like those gaming machines that are labelled "For Entertainment Purposes Only." Whether one has more truth to it than another isn't that important because I find the subjective component gets in the way without proving anything.

My preferred model for an established meme is that of a plate resting upon a table. The plate is only ever in physical contact with a few molecules, and if one should drop away, then another one is always to hand. This is helpful to illustrate how a meme, can be supported by only a few members of society. Furthermore it shows how it doesn't rely on any specific group or geographically close supporters for it to stay supported.

My model for phenomena like the stigmata is different but also classed as memetically governed. Here the meme is akin to a cloud that grows. Instead of gathering moisture, it is gathering of mental energy derived from the devout dwelling upon the wounds of Christ. This cloud of energy grows until an optimum size is reached which provokes a discharge like lightning that goes to ground upon some hapless unwitting bystander. This model can explain luck or destiny in that it is the dreams of the many that fuel the success of the few.

Remember that I am not claiming these models as absolute. I am just using a way to make memetics more amenable to the curious.

Life Imitating Art

We often think that art imitates and portrays life. It is an artiface, an artifact of the real thing. Yet there are numerous examples of life imitating art that show this relationship is more complicated than we commonly suppose.

Documented examples of art predating actuality are best shown by using novels, as the characters and events in film and television are more nebulous and open to interpretation. The Titanic hitting an iceberg is fairly established as common knowledge but how many are aware of Morgan Robertson's 1898 novel called *Futility*? It predates the sinking of the Titanic by fourteen years and is about a great ship named the Titan hitting an iceberg. Thought to be unsinkable, it also carried 3000 people and displaced a similar tonnage. The novel wasn't widely known and only became noticed in retrospect, so it can't be claimed to have fostered a self-fulfilling prophecy. Irony I've found is a reliable indicator of memetic phenomena. Alas, irony is ever usually apparent only in retrospect. Though by making ourselves aware of potential irony and being alert for it, we could potentially circumvent some tragic ironies.

I'm exploring theory so I don't just want this to become a catalogue of incredible coincidences but noted thinkers such as Jung have tried to get a handle on such phenomena. Others like Charles Fort spent a lifetime cataloguing such oddities.

Another example could be Edgar Allen Poe's novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* in which three shipwrecked sailors killed a cabin boy with the intention of eating him. In the novel, the sailors were rescued after the murder but before the cannibalism. Fifty years later this scenario was fulfilled with the three shipwrecked sailors killing the cabin boy with the difference being that they did indeed eat him before being rescued. However in both the novel and in real life, the cabin boy's name of Richard Parker were exactly the same.

When a film or TV show or even a novel has a certain character that achieves a populist niche and then similar traits show up in someone, we make a link. So we might say someone was a Freddy style killer or an Indiana Jones type of adventurer. There has long been a censorship lobby that claim violent acts are mimicked but proof is ever elusive, yet we acknowledge the need for role models. Without taking sides on this debate, it does seem that the creation of a fictional reality can have a factional correspondence. The beauty of memetics of course is that it allows for the correspondence to not have a direct link. So it is that a peculiar type of killer with a distinctive trademark is not even aware of a fictional precursor. Victims of such crimes often look in vain for a link that proves a criminal was inspired by a fictional representation or portrait.

Life imitating art doesn't just happen on a dramatic violent level. It can happen that a prescient author foretells a wonderful invention or social development. It can be coincidental in a neutral sense such as when a crossword compiler started using all the codewords for the D-day landings such as "Pluto" or "mulberry" in his puzzles. Despite being vigorously investigated for giving away information in a covert way, it was apparently a coincidence.

Films as a rule have happenstance meetings but tend to stay away from anything too overtly coincidental as it seems too 'pat' a plot twist. It is belittling to the viewer to have simple coincidences as pushing the plot along as they seem overly convenient, and they also negate the drama of human action and will. The film *Magnolia* started with a dramatisation of some incredible coincidences as a way to set-up the haphazard events of our lives but unfortunately couldn't deliver a coherent storyline.

The travel series "Diceman" has a man choosing destinations and activities by a roll of the dice. I'm interested because of any seemingly random event and travel in general, but the lack of any urgency or real purpose in the travel detracts somewhat from the drama of entertainment.

Does a fictional foretelling of something somehow create the future? Well yes but not in every case obviously though it probably sets up the potential to be actualised. A good example here could be the movie 'Jaws'. I forget which small town was used as the location for the movie but shortly after filming the town recorded it's first ever shark attack. Is this an example of a meme growing to the point of becoming a reality? I prefer to think it is all correspondence but I couldn't say either way. Surely understanding is more important than having an accurate model?

Events happen in life. Those with literary antecedents can seem to have been miraculously fulfilled, and indeed the action of memes is a kind of miracle. Even proverbial or semi-miraculous events from the Bible have been documented in modern times. The biblical story of Jonah about him being carried in the belly of a whale can seem somewhat fanciful but it does have a modern day counterpart. In 1891, a man called James Bartley fell overboard from a ship called "A Star of the East" just off the Falklands. Now I'm not sure if this was a whaling ship, but James ended up being swallowed by a whale. The next day this whale was caught by a whaler and upon being cut open, James was found inside. He was apparently a gibbering idiot for several days after this experience.

Whether the foreshadowing of the future is an example of people who are supernaturally attuned is only part of the equation. These echoes are often remarkably trivial and only in retrospect do they then appear prescient or ironic. Memes give at least a toolkit that can provide fuller explanation. Another example of such a fictional work with a future echo would be the 1951 film *The Tall Target* which featured a New York detective trying to prevent an assassination of a president-elect. The detective's name was John Kennedy. It wasn't an acclaimed or famous movie, but is illustrative of how echoes of the future sound in areas we overlook and consider insignificant.

Twins

Twins are the best example to look at the interplay of memes and genes. Especially interesting are the identical twins that have been separated at birth.Thomas Bouchard from the University of Minnesota started a study in 1979 that has looked at 60 pairs of such twins. He found similarities estimated at 80% between such pairs though he discounted some personal quirks as being too individual and couldn't extrapolate them into the wider group.

The very first set of twins he did tests with (psychological profile tests) were James Springer and Edward Levis. They had been separately adopted at one month of age and had not been reunited until they were 39. There were some staggering coincidences such as they had both married and divorced a woman by the name of Linda and had each remarried to a woman called Betty. There's a slightly different account here from the *Reader's Digest*:

The stories of identical twins' nearly identical lives are often astonishing, but perhaps none more so than those of identical twins born in Ohio. The twin boys were separated at birth, being adopted by different families. Unknown to each other, both families named the boys James. And here the coincidences just begin. Both James grew up not even knowing of the other, yet both sought law-enforcement training, both had abilities in mechanical drawing and carpentry, and each had married women named Linda. They both had sons whom one named James Alan and the other named James Allan. The twin brothers also divorced their wives and married other women -- both named Betty. And they both owned dogs which they named Toy. Forty years after their childhood separation, the two men were reunited to share their amazingly similar lives. (*Reader's Digest,* January, 1980)

A pair of twins that exemplified different cultural upbringing had been born in Trinidad and were separated at age six months. One went to a catholic family in Germany and as this was during the war, joined the Hitler youth. This was Oscar Stohr. His brother (Jack) was raised in a Jewish family in the Caribbean and had also spent some time in Israel. They weren't reunited until their 50's and both had similar gaits, similar speech patterns and ways of thinking. Both liked spicy food and both had the same quirks such as flushing the toilet before using it.

Here's one more twin coincidence.

John and Arthur Mowforth were twins who lived about 80 miles apart in Great Britain. On the evening of May 22, 1975, both fell severely ill from chest pains. The families of both men were completely unaware of the other's illness. Both men were rushed to separate hospitals at approximately the same time. And both died of heart attacks shortly after arrival. (*Chronogenetics: The Inheritance of Biological Time,* Luigi Gedda and Gianni Brenci)

The above example is from the paranormal.about.com website. The news services such as Reuters have regular stories about incredible coincidences concerning twins such as the one below. Now obviously twins are not carbon copies of each other and there are attributes that differ. But so many of them do have lives that run on parallel tracks, that if one twin does something there's a sense of inevitability that the other twin will do something similar just like waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Finnish twin brothers, aged 71, were killed in identical bicycle accidents along the same road two hours apart, police said. "This is simply a historic coincidence. Although the road is a busy one, accidents don't occur every day," police officer Marja-Leena Huhtala told Reuters. "It made my hair stand on end when I heard the two were brothers, and identical twins at that. It came to mind that perhaps someone from upstairs had a say in this," she said.

The reason identical twins can often break their arm or get married on the same days despite no physical contact is memetics. My theory and contention is that because they share the same meme, they are susceptible to the same memetic template. Now it is possible that they develop divergent lives through experience and conscious effort and thereby a meme that differs from their twin, but when they unconsciously are hooked up to it as a cloned animal would be, then their lives run on parallel tracks.

Magic, Mystics and Memes

Would be devolvers of memes that don't really understand how they work are laying themselves open to be used by an amoral force. I'm thinking of occultists that use ceremonies and other inducements as a way to devolve power and affect the universe. Like the energy attributed to a poltergeist, these memetic energies aren't readily controllable and attempts to do so can result in the demise of the attempter. The inherent contradictions of a meme will disrupt any attempted containment.

Having had some experience of meetings of occultists for my own curious quest for knowledge, I was struck by the disproportionate share of cripples and generally unhealthy appearances at such gatherings. I can only assume that those that chant or wave wands to attract a river of universal energy are merely inviting in a dissipation of their own. Now I do think you can focus this river of universal energy and you can use memes to power your activities but this inculcation is subtle and diffuse.

A practical aspect of advanced memetics is divination. The memetic ripples that percolate through our universe are readable to the adept. Astrology operates not by the commonly supposed causal connection but is supposed to indicate a correspondence. Memetics can operate a corresponding system that involves looking for potential ironies. Linguistic irony and fictional foreshadowing are all tools for a memetic prophet. Random and trivial events are all grist for the mill with which to grind out a prognosis and read the signs. The more random and the more startling the coincidence are all evidentiary phenomena with which to build a pattern.

Most people that dabble in magic don't really understand how the universe works and so make bad magicians. Like praying, magic is best not done for some personal immediate gain or to yearn for a result too consciously. Some adepts have incorporated this absent of lust for result approach.

Ritual and ceremony usually drains the performer(s) and empowers some unwitting other as often as not and explains why shamanistic societies aren't very successful. These shamans don't attract the larger benefits because they barely have an inkling of the sideways glance, the soft focus. In the same way that children can grow to embody a parent's wishes, a result is often delayed to the point at which it has been forgotten about. In this way, we are all minor memetic magicians. Our memetic desires are often fulfilled and embodied by our children, such as my own son having fast cars at an age when I would have wanted them myself.

Our lusts can also morph out from the meme to the physical. It seems to me that women are getting progressively more beautiful down the decades, but that's amenable to lots of other explanations. However I was quite surprised to notice that a friend's daughter grew to resemble his long-time mistress. There was no biological connection and I don't think they had ever met, but the similarity was as if they were mother and daughter. Something similar must go on when owners and pets start to resemble each other.

As a personal observation, it seems to me that women down the generations have become increasingly beautiful. Now obviously, some of that is easier lifestyle, better cosmetics, controlled childbirth and such factors that have contributed to women looking better. Quite possibly though, memes could have had an effect, too. As our cultural icons have become refined through films and television, so our actual bodies are terraformed by mental power, by the will. This will creates a meme that then can empower changes.

Physical resemblances can be engineered. Actors are especially practised at it. Actors tap into memes that help them become the character. They are practiced at devolving memes and would normally agree that there is a mystic dimension to it. Mystics that use ceremony or intoxication or fasting are aiming for a disassociative mental state that allows ease of devolvement. By losing themselves in this way, they feel more attuned to the universe. Most of us do this daily by losing our sense of self by devotion to family or involvement with work or join a crowd like at a riot or football match. We enjoy being part of something bigger than ourselves.

Our own selves have memetic divisions. For instance we all have a drunken or stoned self with a separate rationality or mentality that will react differently to our sober self. This isn't the same as a multi personality disorder as our superego chooses which mentality to bring forward. The self that we have when intoxicated can be sustained to become the more common meme of our self. As evidence for this mental model, I suggest our ability to remember something from when we were last in that state but forgotten when we are not.

Our sense of self isn't just a matter of physical intoxication. We can lose our normal mentality by subsuming ourselves in a mob or supporters of a sporting event. Indeed we often seek to alter our mentality by attaching ourselves to something greater than our individual egos. The joy of watching a movie is often described as an escape. What we escape of course, is our normal mundane attachment to our regular memetic self.

When we give up looking for something and then find it, it appears as if a magical fulfillment has happened. That it has been worked up memetically. Let me give you an example. I was looking for a book in the library (Mr Nice) and all three copies had been stolen or never returned. So I gave up looking for it to borrow. Two weeks later, at a neighbor's house, that book is on his floor. In fact it was the only book in the room, so I did get to borrow a copy. But examine the pre-causal reality. At the time, my neighbour got it, he can't have been psychically aware that I was going to search it out to read it. Even though my desire was followed by my finding it. Just as chance favours a prepared mind, so things of interest seem to gravitate to you and your orbit. Now sceptics claim all these unlikely things are ever in our orbit and that we just don't normally notice them or that these chance encounters are all part of a statistical grid. However anyone that has this experience of finding the very thing they want to find knows that it is often so unlikely, that they suspect some undefined force at work. This force is of course, memetics. For my book example to be mechanistically understood, you would have to assume a centralised determinism where my wanting and his having were part of the same ripple. The pulse of the universe which ripples through like a breeze rustling leaves from trees.

Advanced Memetucs

This is where my developed thoughts are more controversial. The tenets I hold, or the conclusions that I've reached aren't as obvious and so not part of any other memetician's theories that I've come across. Maybe a gestation period of thinking about it is required or the sudden flash of inspiration whereby you "get it."

It is the trivial that has needed explanation. The offhand linking of linguistics and coincidences that rarely merit a comment are the very stuff of my research. These small references are at the periphery of everyday life and rarely worth lengthy analyses or comment, yet are the very stuff that fills the interstices of human affairs.

1) Longevity. By incorporating a little bit of its opposite into itself, a meme inoculates itself. So it can allow evil to come out of good or vice-versa. Ironically, a desired effect can be achieved by doing the exact opposite. In political terms this could be a system attuned to selfish greed giving rise to a society that has achieved the greatest good for all, whereas a society built on principles of doing things for the people can degenerate into one of dog eat dog.

In terms often applied to the Holy Grail, you could say that only those that don't seek it will find it. All this seems initially contradictory, but is the key to understanding the survivability of memes. Without incorporating or inoculating itself to a bit of its opposite, a meme would grow but then burst as a bubble.

This incorporation is what allows the pendulum to swing. It agrees with the yin-yang philosophy of how things work. More mechanically than a conceptual worldview, it can school us to expect the periodic eruption of evil from good and vice-versa. No matter how perfect a society or community we can construct, we can ever expect destructive forces ripping it apart. Or from within, as in a murder in a perfect town or family. But then also, we can expect a blooming flower of goodness from the most reviled wasteland. The most horrible things can give birth to beauty or something that binds us closer than ever. It is the nature of memes that shows we should expect the unexpected, to consider the unthinkable and understand that change is ever present within a seemingly stable present.

Unlike the yin-yang symbol, the how and why of how opposites can contain the other is more like the inequitable kernel and the nut. When good and evil coalesce, rather than being equal halves, each has a bit of its antithesis at its core.

Take the concepts of heterosexuality and homosexuality. One is inoculating the other so that there will always be a proportional balance of both. As homosexuality is hardly amenable to genetic propagation, it is a counter that exists to balance the more usual heterosexuality. As such, it will always be part of human life.

This inoculation of the greater by a little bit of its opposite is what allows contradictory notions to coexist. Both are strengthened by the presence of something you might initially expect to be weakened. Only memetics can explain why a lion will coexist with a lamb, why there is always hope in despair, why a wall of mountains will contain a pass, why dock leaves are close to nettles and why antidotes are to be found near poisons. The desert will have an oasis. The answer to something is often close at hand.

A meme achieves greater resilience for itself by this incorporation of a little bit of its opposite. Take smallpox as an example where we inoculate our bodies by exposing ourselves to it. By doing so, we can then resist future encounters with it. Our bodies do this without any conscious effort on our part. Similarly, a meme can inoculate itself by having a bit of contact with its antithesis or that which would negate it. Something that is "good" is stronger for having had contact with something that is evil for instance. By having knowledge and experience with something that could destroy itself, the body of a meme is better able to resist contact with it next time.

2) The Future. It has been said that "coming events cast their shadows before them." This shadow of the future that lies in the past can be understood and interpreted with the help of memetics. I've been successful with mundane and pithy examples, and I'm convinced that by being alert to wordplay and the potential for irony, that we can predict events on a national and global scale.

Our destinies can be seen as ironical twists of fate, but usually best in retrospect. I've noticed scores of times how the unconscious connotations of words can guide the reality. Life imitating art, if you like. And there have been so many bizarre coincidences involving wordplay, that memetics is the only theory that could explain it.

An example that I've had, is meeting someone that has an unusual name of foreign origin. Let's say for example, they were a baker. Now being interested in words, at some later point, I come across their surname someplace else and then discover that it is Greek or somesuch for "bread." Next time I saw them, I'd remark on the coincidence of their surname being linked to their employment. I can't quite recall the specifics right now, but I do recall the subjects were surprised by the linguistic linkage and said they had no idea that their name had any relation to their career.

A recent example of how wordplay can predict a future event would be the Harry Potter hype about the recent movie. If you had played around with the words, "Harry Potter" as a headline, you may easily have come up with a similarity such as "Harry Pothead"! An astute person could have predicted that a drug scandal involving the actor or Prince Harry was about to break. Now this may seem to be a ludicrous coincidence but actually is all part of the correspondence in memetics that allows us to predict the future.

Just as with astrology, it's not a moon in Leo that causes something to happen, but an indicator of the correspondence of human affairs and destiny. All coincidence is a type of memetic correspondence.

This correspondence is what has allowed diviners to look for signs in all kinds of phenomena. Whether the fall of arrows or examination of entrails or the pick of cards, everything could be said to be indicative of future trends. A skilled interpreter would see beyond the usual to some anomaly as a harbinger of something already formed but yet to be part of our experience.

The tenor or direction of birdsong were considered omens by our more pastoral ancestors. This would be scoffed at today, and quite possibly, the birds themselves have lost the harmony with us and are no longer 'in tune' with the universe. Certainly modern man pays no heed to such portents. Yet the hunger to divine what is to be is still with us though relegated to the rare experiment with occult forces. Very few people have managed to attune themselves to what was a prime concern of tribal, pre-TV peoples.

The traditional shamans or seers are just individuals whom have hotwired their brains into such a state of readiness. The meme of themselves has been forged along a certain path. Just like speed freaks whose habitual use of methamphetamine have hotwired their mind and personality along a path that continues even when the drug isn't currently being used. On this model, it is the interpreter that is crucial. Amateurs just looking for signs won't have the required feel for the art. Divination methods lie sprinkling water on a bull and others have no longer been refined so will ever appear downright silly. Modern man is correct to regard them as mere superstition because the meme that once granted some potency has been eroded away. But something that we all have as a memetic magnet are the words we use. Magical language is usually thought of as something like "Abracadabara", but all words have a certain power.

Words are a potent unconscious linker of memes. You can change your name and thereby change your luck. Or consider the divinely stipulated name changes in the bible... of Saul to Paul or Abram to Abraham or that of Jacob to Israel. Maybe it's that words can attract or devolve certain memes better than others.

Irony is a key ingredient that can affect our future achievements. Consider someone like Canute who demonstrated to his courtiers that it was impossible for a king to turn back the tide. Ironically this demonstration has come to mean the opposite of that which he intended. He will forever be known as the king that tried to turn back the tide and got his feet wet. There's an irony that is always twisting our messages, frustrating our desires and making 'the best made plans of mice and men' unmade. Memetics will never eradicate hubris or stop us being blind to our own limitations or failings, or even allow us to dam these forces. What it will do is show that irony and coincidence are warp and weft of the same fabric. It is to be hoped that this understanding can indeed lead to a more useful model of action and consequence.

By being alert to potential irony, we can predict potential scenarios and the most astute will fasten on the likely one. It's worth reiterating that it's not x that causes y but by looking for correspondences, when we see x we can then predict that y will follow. Let me try and elaborate with a concrete example.

Princess Diana and her car crash death are quite well known. Now a few months before this, a children's television show called 'Early Edition' aired. Part of the plot involved the cast reading of a girl's car accident from a psychic newspaper. This is in spring 1997 and the main character (called Hobson) reads about the future in his special newspaper. He reads about the girl dying because an ambulance doesn't get there in time and turns the page to show a picture and reference to Lady Di.

Now it isn't the case that the show plot made her car crash happen, or even that it predicted it. But it is indicative of the forces at work that were approaching a denouement. By being alert to such correspondences, one may be alerted to impending danger or tragedy in your own life. I would have said that foreshortening her name from Diana to Di was an unfortunate encouragement of such a demise especially with so many people now yelling out "Di" at her.

In my test, of thinking about something periodically, and then this has a memetic attraction for other references or phenomena, this is bending the future. By actively engaging a meme, we are moving from simple correspondence to using the will, albeit in a passive non-aware sense. Our ultimate destinies may not be altered but within the framework of our options, we are able to affect changes. It's a bit like not being able to change our circumstance yet choosing whether to be happy or sad about it. Anyway we can choose to attract or repel references and phenomena to some extent.

Now skeptics would say that just by focussing on something makes us more aware of the many references already out there. A bit like when you buy a car of a certain model and then you notice them all over the place. However it is my contention, that this is a simplistic model that belies the very real creative power of our brains to construct circumstance. If I think about say a Japanese soldier and then come across several references to imperial Nipponese military, then something very real has transformed the nature of my experience. Because it simply isn't true that I was previously bombarded by references to Japanese soldiery. Similarly for other esoteric subjects that we then discover links to. We have juggled our future experience.

Now whether this test works for you or not, of course it doesn't prove anything. My discussions with sceptics imply that I have to prove something. But I am showing not proving. To prove without doubt is simply going to be impossible just as not even the pope is going to be able to prove God. What I'm trying to do is show how memetic explanations can allow understanding of phenomena that mystifies us.

Memetic arcs are better models for divination than linear models of time's arrow. By examining the seemingly insignificant, memetics can be a type of transataumancy which is divination by events seen or heard accidentally. But there is a bit more to it than just that. By understanding memetic pairings and the kernel and nut pattern of inoculated memes, so it is that you can appreciate how it is that surprises such as the greatest war can erupt from the biggest peace.

Some surprises or events that happen are statistically random. Now sceptics that kowtow to statistics being able to explain all anomalies tend to overreach themselves here. Yes, many odd things are to be statistically expected, but to extrapolate from this that all bizarre coincidences are statistically normal is making unwarranted conclusions. Fortunately for them, most people aren't logicians and are unable to argue the case that extrapolating the general rule from the particular in every case has no validity.

If you think about the meta-theory of statistics, you will have to consider that there is a force that ensures statistical patterns are upheld. If you have a stretch of road that consistently has several fatalities per year, and then you examine the individual accidents and find some that aren't attributable to the road as such, (someone reaching under the seat and losing control or a pedestrian crossing unusually), then you have to wonder if an invisible force is operating to keep up the numbers as it were. This force that acts as a governor on random phenomena is of memetic origin. By understanding this memetic mechanism, I believe we can indeed come to grips with future events. A sceptic would find this difficult to accept but then a skeptic finds much that they can't see and touch difficult.

3) Blood Sacrifice. I've noticed that the establishment of memes seem intertwined with the demise of certain people. The development of new ways of thinking seems to have a type of blood sacrifice associated with its gestation. Whether the meme is of Christianity, air travel or a new nation, blood seems to be inevitably spilled on the road to establishment.

A new political party would be a typical example here. As a new voice arises, there is some repression from established interests and demonstrators or political leaders are often killed. This is unfortunate but it is invariably a stepping stone on the path to establishing the new belief system. Blood cements the idea into a meme.

A new meme is ever fragile but as accidental, ritual or combative deaths rise, the meme seems to strengthen. The first rat to run through a maze cautiously senses the danger more than the thousandth to do so. Same for us with air or space travel.

All new activity is dangerous and breaking the mould. It is only when established that we can treat it as routine.

It's probable that our ancestors instinctively felt this memetic truth, which prompted animal and human sacrifice. This never ensured the desired results and was always a religion that was usurped. Nevertheless, some memes do seem to become much more cemented into our psyche by body count (think martyrs) and some memes seem to generate a steady toll. An example could be said to be a river, one that had a personality attributed to it. Once upon a time, a water sprite may have been blamed for a steady harvest of drownings, but now we could view it as a meme. Memes like those for nations or political viewpoints almost require a certain amount of conflict to persevere.

This ever present attrition in human vitality can be best seen in a large business or national conglomeration. Here, people work and grow old in their jobs. Some die before retirement and there's a steady toll, an attrition.

There's also an attrition from memes attached to certain objects, what could be called talismans. These objects seem to attract carnage in a way that defies simple coincidence. When the bad luck is attached to a person, they are known as a "Jonah" or some such. We know through fiction and legend that certain things can be exceptionally unlucky and cause the demise of say the firstborn or the owners of such objects, or as with a Jonah, cause a ship to be stricken.

Take the train carriages involved in the Hatfield crash also being involved in the Selby crash. Not the engine, but several of the carriages apparently. To most people, this is an incredible coincidence, especially as it was a car not the train that was the cause of the accident. Now memetically what happened was that the first accident created a meme binding the inanimate rolling stock with a crash. The fatalities sealed the meme as a blood sacrifice that also made it more potent. This is the ancient connection of blood sacrifices creating power.

This new powerful meme then sucks in phenomena. It starts to attract accidents, and this force caused the car driver to lose control in the proximity of the fateful train.

Every meme has a life span of its own, so the fact that people are now aware of the accursed train (*Scottish Herald* readers were aware... I didn't see it mentioned in the British press), means that it has lost it's power and probably won't be involved in any more fateful accidents. This is because memes work best when no-one realises they are acting.

Another memetic aspect to the notion of sacrifice is that all can be imbued by a little bit of the one. This is the basic tenet of tribal cannibalism, which I'm not trying to justify in any way, just explaining the instinctually felt memetic law behind it. Not all culture resorted to eating as a way to imbue themselves. Many thought they could imbue themselves by combustion of the God object as a way to pass its strength and characteristics onto many. Indeed, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is the very same type of thing.

4) God. I thought I could explain everything via memetics and believed that the meme pools of good and evil were vast memes that could also explain God and the Devil. Surely I had cracked the cosmic puzzle and found the universal key.

In my desert cabin where I developed the more advanced parts of my memetic theory, I was surprised by a vision or divine manifestation thereby demonstrating an independently vigorously real existence. This was a devolvement of a sort I hadn't anticipated and my jaw was paralysed for three hours following. There was a telepathic communication of approval, of some incongruous foreknowledge and in response to a specific question from me, I was referred to a piece of scripture not part of the current bible. From this experience, I became convinced that this memetics is God's governing system in place so that he isn't required to constantly tinker with our lives. Everything that will transpire and all of destiny is a memetically governed phenomenon. Just as a universe can be said to be contained in a grain of sand, so all of human affairs are known to Him by the least.

Memetics can explain the mundane and the staggering coincidence. It is why God can predict with supreme confidence what is going to happen. With memetics, there is no need for individual tinkering and those that feel especially blessed or divinely guided are reaping the benefits of a memetic governing system. It is a conceit to imagine God is dogging their footsteps. There is an overwhelming need to feel special and loved by God but he connects with us with invisible memetic laws that are stronger than iron. Far from making God redundant, this shows his sagacity for the dynamics of his creation. A far from blind watchmaker encoded our rules, our reach and our destiny into our being.

Prayer could be viewed as a type of memetic mechanism. It rarely operates as a simple wish fulfilment, and there seems to be a kind of fail-safe system whereby praying for bad things to happen seem to backfire. Praying for others also seems more effective than simply for ourselves, and prayers could well create a meme that can affect an actuality.

Praying to a false god would seem to bolster the memetic construct that is that god. Unfortunately for the believers, when the prayers stop, the construct must wane. Despite propping the construct with constant prayer, this god will only ever be a shadow to the real one.

Miracles can be explained by memetic power. If enough people pray and want something, some physical manifestations are possible. Like the dwelling on Christ's wounds than can trigger the stigmata, it isn't everyone that is going to be affected. Miracle cures like the ones credited to Lourdes, it is always a few cures that seem miraculous and many people go away unchanged. The stigmata seems to only affect one in several million so miracle cures may well be a similar lottery. It is the dreams of the many that fuel the success of the few.

Jesus may well have been able to direct this memetic and holy power.

But as it was written that he didn't perform miracles in Nazareth for the people's lack of faith and was reluctant to do miracles on immediate request on other occasions, just perhaps it wasn't always as simple as turning on a tap. Perhaps a certain reservoir of memetic power had to be filled before it could be directed. This isn't implying that God was weak, just that an operating system established by God had certain governing rules.

Memetics can explain the ironies in our lives. It can explain why the good can die young or why evil people can prosper. These aren't rigorous rules, but are examples of the exception proving a rule. The opposite of what we might expect or hope for, is the inoculation that preserves the rest.

There are many minority or deviant behaviours that provide counter examples to the norm. Seemingly paradoxically, it is these examples that strengthen the rest. One could for instance suggest that homosexuality is the example that inoculates heterosexuality and the existence of one, gives robustness to the other's survival. The lesser end of a plank can help balance the whole.

Good and evil are similarly portrayed as opposite ends of a sliding scale or plank, with gradations of good and depths of evil. On the memetic model, these are often coexistent and the greatest good is sometimes surrounded by the worst evil or can be the source of such. Similarly a sink of iniquity can throw up an example of goodness. Happy families driven asunder or murders bringing communities together would be examples of good turning bad, or bad giving rise to good.

All such situations can be rendered as part of a moral grid where intention, action and consequence are weighted. The necessary evil of visiting the dentist would normally have good intentions and consequences but a bad action, and you can ascribe everything from the most mundane to the most heroic to a moral table. This may help our understanding of moral situations and thereby allow us to juggle the bigger concept of interconnectedness.

Earlier I suggested that as a population increases, so the diversity of memes increase. You can see this on a small scale with a large family. Those with a lot of children seem to diversify as with any large group. So it is that you will get a crook and a cop, a sinner and a saint all sharing the same genes. It is as if our lots are apportioned for us. Number seven, you get to be an actor or a homosexual, number twelve, you will be crucified and so on. A larger family doesn't bring mental similarity, it seems to bring all possible permutations. Neither does a family guarantee love or loyalty. It can resolve itself into a pecking order that any unrelated group of animals attain.

As we have gone forth and multiplied, we have also maximised the memes that can exist. Perhaps we are to multiply ourselves to devolve enough memes until we reach the one that allows apotheosis.

I had tried to build a memetic philosophy that explained everything, even God, but was forced to consider that God created memetics. Jesus said (Mathew 13:12), "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that he hath."

People usually interpret this in a "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer" context, but it is about understanding. Memetics is entwined with human nature to ensure that those who do seek will indeed, find.

Whether you believe in God or not, if you believe that memetics can indeed be a universal theory for explicating things, then you have to consider gigantic memes for good and for evil. When you make a moral choice or undertake an action for bad or for good, these memes do empower your choice and accelerate you further along the path you have chosen.

I can't prove any of these claims, but I can explain things that mystify others. I do think you can make predictions based on my theory.

As if these claims of a possible guide to divination aren't startling enough, there are other possibilities on the table. If you believe as I do that memetics is a governing system put in place by the world's creator, then you must also consider that there are uses to it that are unlikely to be readily apparent. One of these uses is a quick way for God to separate the wheat from the chaff as it were.

Memetics for Today

This system of memetics, regardless of its origins and outer limits, can be used to explicate all kinds of esoteric phenomena like nothing else. It can also make sense of some of today's baffling events. For instance, the spectacular terrorist success in destroying the world trade towers can be explained by operating on an auspicious date (for them) of 9/11. The meme of calling 911 emergency created an empowerment to their goals. I'm sure they hadn't picked the date for any numeric quality, but just because a Tuesday flight would have less passengers to subdue than a Monday or a Friday. Their bold plan was correspondingly enabled by memetic forces, which they weren't conscious of. Another date may have had more stumbling progress towards their goals. The unconscious energy in the meme of 911 empowered them, but now that everyone is conscious of the date, it won't work again.

Yet the mental energy, the meme generated by that event will empower another date and as long as there is no conscious focus upon it, a terrorist or some such could easily find his unselfconscious action empowered. I would predict something could happen in September 2011, as it has a 9-11 link which isn't immediately obvious to most people.

Memetics does suggest that there are auspicious and inauspicious dates or days for various activities.

Now, what of the satanic faces captured on photos of the smoke from the world trade centre disaster? A full blown memetic theory would say that the memes of evil as represented by satanic anthropomorphism devolved upon the animated object of smoke. Here's a website that has several different pictures of Satan in the smoke. http://users.kvmp.net/veijonenh/satan.htm

It's a similar process that can allow us to see faces in mountain ranges or in shapes on Mars. Something similar is at work making icons weep or statues bleed.

This ability we have to psychologically project personalities upon inanimate things can indeed cause real phenomena.

Throughout history, man has believed high mountains are the abode of the gods. Singular volcanoes and mountains have been ascertained as angry, benevolent or sometimes vengeful and sometimes benign. Man can easily project his own fears and emotions upon the land, but whilst we today view such things as mere superstition, there can be a bit more to it than we willingly admit.

The landscape is replete with anthropomorphic shapes. In fact my memetic explanation of the Easter island statues would be that the people who built them were reconstructing their old homelands. They were doing this by representing their local gods, normally seen as profiles in the landscape, by recreating them upright as statues. A sharp pointy nose may well indicate a volcanic peak and slightly different profiles may well be the same area but having been viewed from a differing compass point.

Cloning seems to have run into some problems such as producing animals that age prematurely and/or are more prone to disease such as Dolly the sheep's arthritis. I would explain this memetically as the biological organism 'tapping into' an already existing meme for itself. Normally an animal generates a meme of itself with a fresh arc of existence that grows as does its own life. A clone doesn't need to do this so joins with a readymade meme, where the groove has already been trammelled. So it joins the meme already into an arc of existence and travels faster along it for not having to blaze a new path.

For corroborating evidence of memes and genes, you only have to look at the incredible coincidences that twins undergo. Regularly in the few cases where identical twins have been separated at birth and without contact with each other, they have typically identical life experiences. They often marry spouses with the same name and career or they both break a wrist or have a car crash on the same day and so on. Quite happily for these separated twins is that a chance meeting will allow them to find each other. Well it seems like chance, but is another example of memetics.

Although I predicted clones would have problems in advance of the fact, without a platform to broadcast my beliefs, I am stymied as to how to get my views out there. For several years, I considered a website and am currently contacting academics, to let them know my developing philosophy. Any help with research ideas or publicity would be welcomed. An early paper of mine is on the internet at www.soli.com/jhardy/memetics.txt and I can usually be contacted via jakkoooo@hotmail.com

Probably the best demonstration of memetics would be to predict something startling, and then have it unfold. However, memetics may be fantastic at alerting us to trends or possible ironies, but it can hardly guarantee them. It may be it's very essence that something seized upon as a possibility is automatically ensured that it will not become the case. Specific events may ever slip from our predictive grasp.

Trends are much more amenable to a memetic rationality. By considering what could be a factor in making one culture's memes more acceptable to another, as in the case of immigration where the memes of one culture have to exist alongside another, I suspected that females would facilitate integration. More aggressive males could rapidly escalate conflict between cultural memes, although both approaches have merit. I guessed that immigrant families would have more female than male children in the host country. A cursory telephone poll of maternity nurses seemed to confirm this hypothesis. This isn't especially an axe that I wish to grind, but it is suggestive of how memes can be researched and used in the future.

One of the most difficult concepts in my work for others to accept is that of memetic word play. It seems trivial to look for realistic truths in games that are akin to the 'sounds like' games of infant school. However, the interstices of truth are borne out by a theory that can encompass the ordinary, the seemingly unimportant as well as the grand. It is the little things glimpsed out of the corner of our eye that can prove ultimately the most significant. It can be the discarded evidence that proves the reality. Tracking memes is akin to the skill of the bush tracker. The broken twig or small depression, are all small clues to the wider reality of whom, what, how, when and the why.

I started this work with the name of R. Dawkins who popularised the idea of memes. The meme of memes has snowballed since then, though the theorists have not really developed the outer reaches of it. This work is designed to bust open the strait jacket that unimaginative technicians would confine this meme into.

Memetics is a new kind of explanatory science. Traditional science is an advance from one description to a better description that encompasses more or anomalous phenomena. Whilst memetics is better able to explain some things we once thought unexplainable, it still adheres to this traditional model. Where it differs radically is that memetics says that x doesn't follow y in every case, just in some cases. Science accepts a high probability that x will follow y, when we talk of gravitational or electrical laws, and these forces show uniformly high conformity. This action producing a reaction is a correspondence that we always see, yet laws of human affairs have been stymied by a lack of similar repeatability. Every time a gas expands, it will conform to a mathematical formula, yet every time a meme expands through a society, any formula describing it would be unlikely to have a mathematical simplicity. It may indeed have a mathematical representation, but whatever it would be, it would have a form that says x equals y but sometimes z.

I used a couple of potential representative models in the section on coincidence, but advanced memetics involves more than the model of a cloud growing and then raining upon the unwitting. It involves understanding how a meme inoculates itself for a long life by encompassing a contradiction or it's opposite. This is the exception that proves the rule and makes the meme stronger. Short-lived fads and fashions are the best examples of simple memes, because the complex ones of family or good or evil have no consensus of definition. Our selves can be defined as simple reactions or lists of likes and dislikes, but connected with the universe, we innately feel ourselves to be more than that.

The best thing to convey memetics would be a catchy meme. Instead of verbose rationality, an anthemic song with a turaloorai-ay chorus would be better than lengthy words. My volumes of memetic thinking and the hours needed to read them restrict the learning or study to a literate elite. So it goes.

Memes devolve as rain when a fashion spreads or as lightning in a singular way. Three or four people may have the same dramatic insight or revelation or invention that one then carries to completion. Great artists or mystics lay themselves open to the meme's devolvement by practised operation of consciousness twisting. It may seem unnecessary to anthropomorphise a meme in this way but I find it useful to do so. It acts as if it has a life of it's own irrespective of the actuality. No matter how precious or wonderful an argument one can muster, there will always be others ready to flush it away. This is the nature of rationality and I'm using it as a tool not insisting that one tool is more truthful than another.

The above points show that memetics is a unique and universal theory of explanation. Surely more research can develop this potential and make all phenomena, even that once considered esoteric and occult into an understandable paradigm.

Memetics holds the promise of the philosopher's stone. By explaining all things, it can be the key to the secrets of the universe. For the philosopher, the theologian, the parapsychologist, it could be the dawn of a golden age

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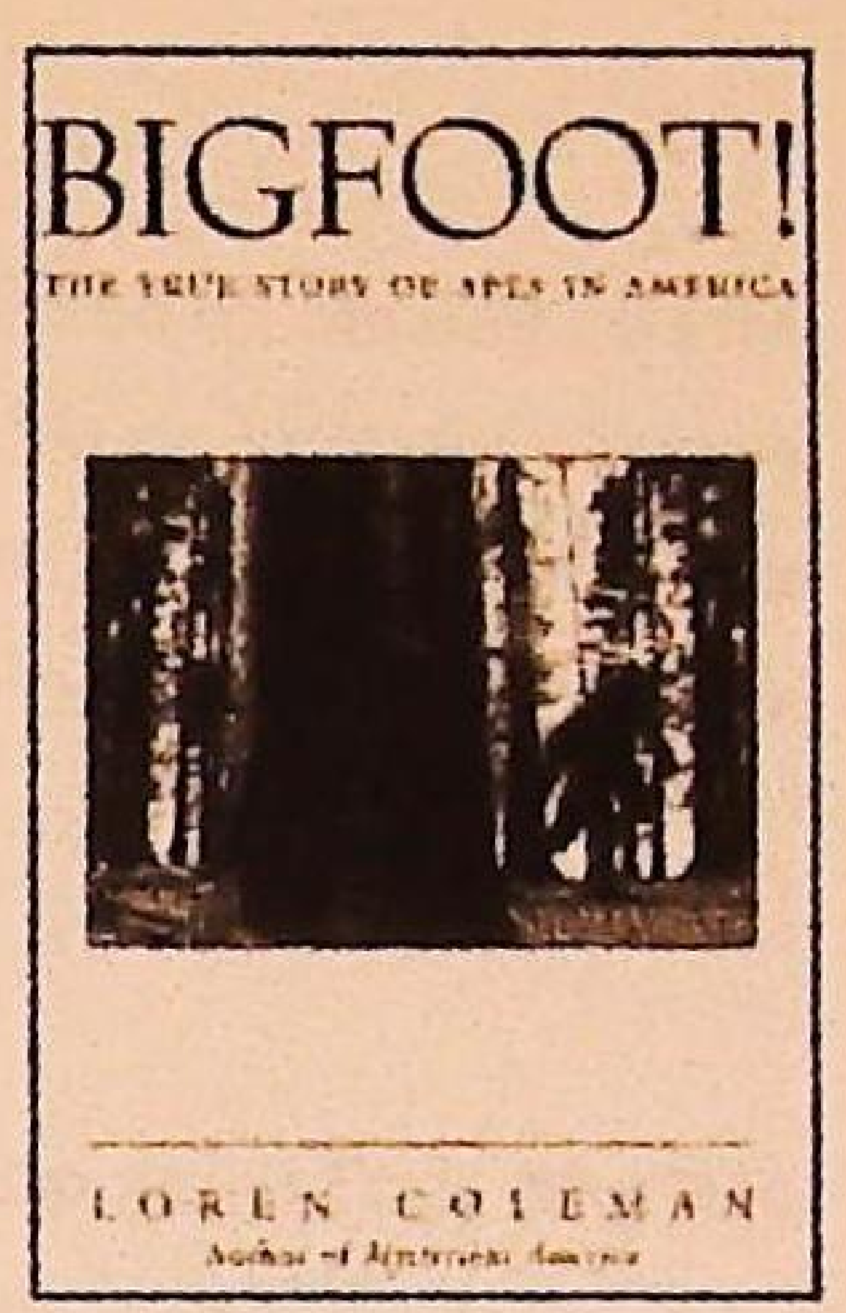
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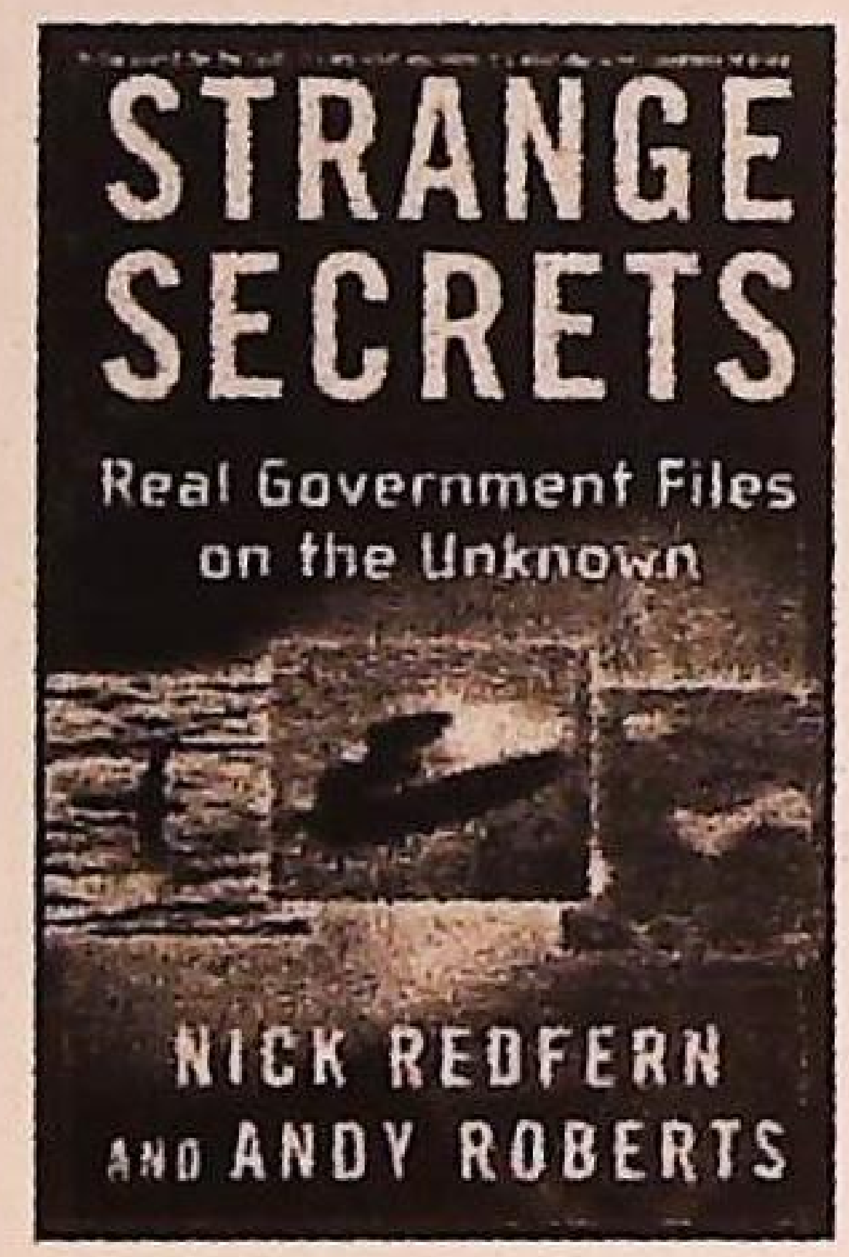
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